

FUGITIVE QUEENS:  
Amakhosikazi and the Continuous Evolution of Gender and  
Power in KwaZulu-Natal (1816-1889)

by

CAELLAGH D. MORRISSEY

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Professor Lindsay F. Braun

*Amakhosikazi* (elite women) played a vital role within the social, economic, and political reality of the Zulu pre-colonial state. However, histories have largely categorized them as accessory to the lives of powerful men. Through close readings of oral traditions, travelogues, and government documentation, this paper discusses the spaces in which the *amakhosikazi* exhibited power, and tracks changes in the social position of queen mothers, as well as some members of related groups of elite women, from the early years of the Zulu chiefdom in the 1750s up until the 1887 annexation by Britain and their crucial intervention in royal matters in 1889. The *amakhosikazi* can be seen operating in a complex social space wherein individual women accessed power through association to political clans, biological and economic reproduction, manipulation, and spiritual influence. Women's access to male power sources changed through both internal political shifts and external pressures, but generally increased in the first half of the 1800s, and the declined over time and with the fracturing of Zulu hegemony. As a result, elite women became marginalized in both Zulu and colonial political structures. This study raises questions about the character of women's shared experiences, and those of other categories of women within the Zulu polity.

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## Glossary of Terms<sup>1</sup>

***Amadlozi*** (pl.) – ancestral spirits who can influence the present

***Isibongo*** (pl. *izibongo*) – praise poems or oral compositions used to introduce and identify in Zulu society, composed and recited by an *imbongo*

***Ilobola*** – negotiated bride-price or marriage fee exchanged between families

***Ibutho*** (pl. *amabutho*) – military regiment; men's or women's age grade group

***Inceku*** – personal attendant

***Induna*** (pl. *izinduna*) – person of authority: principal man/headman

***Umuzi*** (pl. *imizi*) – homestead or household unit

***Ikhandu*** (pl. *amakhanda*) – the regimental Zulu strongholds

***Inkatha*** – is the name for the head ring, a grass coil, for household heads

***Inkatha yezwe*** – specific sacred head ring sacred to the Zulu nation

***Inkhosazana*** (pl. *amakhosazana*) – term referring to the head wife of the principle chief

***Inkhosi*** (pl. *amakhosi*) – chief, paramount chief, or king (often with *enkulu*, or great).

***Inkhosikazi*** (pl. *amakhosikazi*) – wives or queen mothers of the chief

***Inkhosazana*** (pl. *amakhosazana*) – sisters to the royal Zulu family

***Mfecane*** – a supposed wave of chaos warfare that caused widespread depopulation

***Umdlukulu*** (pl.) – royal handmaidens

***IsiZulu*** – the language generally spoken by Zulu peoples

***KwaZulu*** – The Zulu kingdom and its territory, also known as Zululand

***Zulu (or amaZulu)*** - describes a people who lived, and continue to live, under that identity on the eastern coast of South Africa

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Elizabeth Eldredge, *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom: War, Shaka, and the Consolidation of Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), x-xi.

## Introduction

Past iterations of Zulu history have undervalued elite women. Western readers, influenced by a colonial legacy, have falsely stereotyped the Zulu Kingdom in Eastern South Africa as an extreme example of patriarchy. As a result the lives of women in general and queen mothers, or elite sister wives, in particular has become fugitive within the accepted historical record. These stereotypes have been perpetuated by unequal representation and marginalization of Zulu women in the present day. However, on examining the roots of these beliefs, evidence has alerted historians to a more complicated and nuanced relationship between gendered roles in the Zulu kingdom and its predecessors. This thesis seeks to develop questions about the experiences of the *amakhosikazi*, elite queen-mothers of the Zulu royal household, as well as some members of related groups of elite women. I examine the oral traditions of precolonial Zulu history, to identify the places where women could access change and track the transformation of the social position of *amakhosikazi* in the royal Zulu lineage. I present possibilities for ways that *amakhosikazi* enacted agency in Zulu society, how elite women's access to power changed over time, and what internal or external forces may have contributed to changes in their social position.

This subject rests at the intersection of two lines of historiographical and theoretical contention, one about gender power generally, and the other about the formation of kwaZulu specifically. Sea changes in the approach of historians, and historians concerned with feminism especially, have sought to complicate notions of subordination and turn the dialogue to questions of capabilities and agency within gendered social positions. These arise in conjunction with a growing understanding of

the subjective nature of European histories and an understanding of both created ignorance perpetuated in the colonial legacy, and efforts to decolonize and complicate pre-colonial and colonial stories as dialogue between two opposing paradigms.

Scholars have theorized a trajectory of women's power in Zulu history wherein Shaka created entirely new institutions, such as a tributary system of wives or concubines, to harness feminine authority.<sup>2</sup> Others hold that women played a role, but only in a highly circumscribed way limited to the infancy of the chieftdom.<sup>3</sup> None of the sources explore the roles of individual women beyond 1830, nor attempt to chart the shifting social role of the *amakhosikazi* through the nineteenth century, as this thesis aims to do.

### *Background*

The Zulu as a people existed as a chieftainship in the southeastern plains before growing significantly in size and power under Shaka kaSenzangakhona. In 1816 Shaka succeeded his father, Senzangakhona kaJama, to Zulu chieftainship.<sup>4</sup> During Shaka's twelve-year reign the influence and structure of the Zulu polity expanded and changed dramatically.<sup>5</sup> Intrigue within the Zulu royal family underscored Zulu politics for the next nine decades. Roles and responsibilities were continuously re-imagined as the Zulu

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<sup>2</sup> Sean Hanretta, "Women, Marginality, and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 39, no. 3 (1998): 404.

<sup>3</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*.

<sup>4</sup> John Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), xxii.

<sup>5</sup> The character of this change is contentious. See *inter alia* Julian Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988): 487-519; Elizabeth Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, ca. 1800-30: The 'Mfecane' Reconsidered," *Journal of African History* 33, no. 1 (1992): 1-35; Carolyn Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks* (London: Longman, 2001), 335-46; John Wright, "Turbulent Times: Political Transformations in the North and East 1760s-1830s" *The Cambridge History of South Africa* 2 vols. Edited by Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard Mbenga, Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009-2010), 211-252.



chiefdom expanded and reorganized into a true kingdom. In the first twenty-five years of its existence the Zulu nation experienced two changes in power due to assassination. Dingane, Shaka's half-brother, killed him in 1828, and was in turn overthrown by a third brother, Mpande, in 1840.<sup>6</sup> Matriclan support was pivotal in challenges for the crown between half-brothers. Contested successions for the crown resulted in unrest at best, and even outright civil war, which created vital space for power-brokerage among elite Zulu women. However, the plasticity of Zulu politics also created room for manipulation by external forces, such as the British imperials and Boer settlers, who intervened strategically in Zulu successions and conflicts.

Over the course of the nineteenth century British colonial structures, and conflict with Boer settlers contributed to the fracture and decline of the Zulu kingdom. The British entered the region first as traders at Port Natal with the blessing of the Zulu leadership, and later Imperial forces followed the Boers as part of a strategic land grab.<sup>7</sup> The influence of the Zulu ruling family declined as their claim to control was contested by external forces, and fractures within the group. In 1879 the Zulu king (*inkhosi enkulu*) Cetshwayo was defeated in the Anglo-Zulu War, a major moment in the kingdom's collapse. He was exiled to Cape Town and Britain shortly afterwards, and his territory subsequently broken into 13 separate entities, each controlled by a British-appointed *inkhosi*. Colonial forces from then onwards were heavily involved in Zulu politics, creating policy according to distorted assumptions about Zulu "traditional" practices. This version of indirect control exacerbated by ongoing conflicts, and

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<sup>6</sup> John Laband, *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation* (London: Arms & Armour, 1997) 45-46, 123-33.

<sup>7</sup> John Laband and Paul Thompson, "The Reduction of Zululand 1878-1904," *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910*. Edited by Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), 193-232.

increased economic pressures, provoked some Zulu people to rebel. Despite sporadic fighting between 1880 and 1888, and the tragic, short-lived return of Cetshwayo, competing factions were unable to effectively unify kwaZulu under a single leader.

In 1887, alarmed by a deal between the Zulu heir Dinuzulu and mercenary Boer land hunters from the Transvaal who had aided him in the war, one which could give the combative Boer led South African Republic independent harbor access, the British imperial government annexed the area they had recognized for Zulu people (while still realizing land to the Boer Republic). Ten years later, they appended it to the settler-ruled Colony of Natal. While a sovereign Zulu monarchy was no longer feasible, traditional chiefly families, and Christian Zulu people (a growing power within KwaZulu and Natal during the early twentieth century). The idea of a Zulu quasi-polity has since been restored and re-invented by various nationalist groups in Natal. Throughout this process interested groups have heavily adulterated the concept of a “Zulu Nation” in order to achieve their own political ends in kwaZulu and Natal.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this general historical arc, the *amakhosikazi* can be seen operating in a complex social space wherein individual women accessed power through association to political clans, biological and economic reproduction, manipulation, and spiritual influence. Women’s access to male power sources changed through both internal political shifts between *amakhosi* and due to external pressures of expanding Boer and British presences. However women’s access to power had generally increased in the first half of the 1800s, and only declined with the fracturing of Zulu hegemony, when elite women were marginalized in both Zulu and Colonial political structures.

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<sup>8</sup> Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, ed., *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1980).

This study mainly focuses on *amakhosikazi* in the Zulu royal lineage, though not to exclusion. There are other categories of Zulu women who lived in the royal compound, the *isigodhlo*, including the *amakhosazana*, or sisters/daughters in the royal house, as well as the *umndlunkulu*, the “royal handmaidens.”<sup>9</sup> Within the compound *amakhosikazi* held the most prestige as the ‘mothers’ of the king, which was contingent upon age and marital status, not biological parentage. In some areas I will discuss the status of other categories of women in the *isigodhlo*, but will largely follow the stories of these most prestigious and visible women who are usually the most prominent in the historical record. Although focusing on the *amakhosikazi* limits my study to the Zulu elite, it is the most feasible considering the lack of information about lower social classes.

The social political space of the *isigodhlo* is pivotal to conceptualizing the *amakhosikazi*. The *isigodhlo* represents both the physical space where elite women lived, and a name for the women who lived there themselves. The *isigodhlo* was a partitioned area of Zulu royal capitals and regimental towns (*amakhandas*), accessible only to the royal women and the chief or king.<sup>10</sup> Within this compound women adhered to strict social hierarchies where the ruling household members, both *amakhosikazi* (mothers) and *amakhosazana* (sisters), held the most powerful positions. The prominent clan groups in the Zulu chiefdom were often required to provide young women as *umndlunkulu* for the *isigodhlo* as part of their tribute to the ruling Zulu family. Jennifer

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<sup>9</sup> *umndlunkulu* refers to the unmarried women who might serve to the Zulu chief and his household both as domestic servants and also as sexual partners for men.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term “chief” to designate the male heads of particular family clans, known as *inkhosi* in isiZulu, the Zulu language. The term “king” is also common in historical literature, but chief and chiefdom refer more accurately to the loosely-held federations of families that existed in pre-colonial KwaZulu-Natal. Fundamentally, these kings were extreme articulations of this form of chiefly federation, as opposed to a radical departure from previous norms. In this study, “king” denotes the paramountcy of the lineage of Senzangakhona.

Weir and other scholars using feminist analyses have suggested that the intention of the *isigodhlo* was in part to incorporate all of the various powerful clans into a single unified location and incorporate them into a more centralized Zulu household.<sup>11</sup> Regardless, it provides the setting for much of the activity and experience of many of the elite women this study examines. Before turning to the actual examination of the *amakhosikazi*, this thesis will now turn to the state of scholarship surrounding this topic and the historiography of primary sources used in the study.

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Weir, “Chiefly Women and Women’s Leadership in Pre-Colonial South Africa,” *Women in South African History*. Edited by Nomboniso Gasa(Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 7.

## **Historiography**

### **Origin and State of Current Discussion**

One of the central purposes of this study is to examine relevant primary sources against the grain of colonialism's culture; to avoid letting the focus of state enterprise, elite colonist sentiment, and an older teleological understanding of the past define the present narrative. Despite Europeans' long-standing fascination with the amaZulu, partially due to the 1879 defeat of the British in the battle of Isandlawana, a historical study of elite Zulu women has yet to be produced using the range of oral and written sources readily available to us. This thesis aims to move beyond the current perspectives, and to present a new story from an alternative lens, by understanding the theories behind and constraints of historical accounts that do not address gender as a category of analysis. Even limited to an elite group within Zulu society, through the medium of translation and a limited base of available evidence, it is still abundantly clear that there are aspects of this story which are fugitive due to historical emphasis on the economic, military, and political lives of Zulu kings and other elite men. The traditional history, founded on colonial practices of pseudo-anthropology, ignores spaces of women's agency both in lives of powerful men and in Zulu society at large. In recent decades historians have become more sensitive to the experiences of marginalized peoples in a sort of decolonization of history, as they accept oral histories, folklore and other expressions of indigenous knowledge to be viable sources of historical evidence. Attempts to create a more sympathetic Zulu past have been driven by a number of intersecting developments in South African history and historiography more broadly.

## *Historical Developments*

Donald R. Morris's *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation* can serve as an example of one of the first attempts to revisit Zulu history with a perspective that placed the African experience at center stage.<sup>12</sup> Published in 1966, near the height of the apartheid era, Morris attempted to present this part of South African history from a less biased standpoint than the classic nineteenth century histories. However, Morris continued to rely on false theories about the Zulu as an inherently savage people, engaged in a chaotic authoritarian patriarchy. His book restated concepts of a supposed *mfecane*, or violent construction of the Zulu state, that George McCall Theal and other early South African historians popularized at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> He also perpetuated views of women as enslaved and accessory to men's lives. The most pervasive and potentially most fallible of these nineteenth century historians was A.T. Bryant, a missionary in whose works were circulated and consistently relied upon by historians. John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton have proven Bryant's work to be deeply flawed, and in some instances completely fabricated, but occasionally still consulted by South Africanists without consideration of these limitations.<sup>14</sup>

Morris' reworking came during a period of time, the 1950-60s, when oral histories were being reclaimed as viable sources of historical evidence as other white

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<sup>12</sup> Donald R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1966).

<sup>13</sup> For examples of Theal's official but flawed history see George McCall Theal, *History of South Africa from 1873 to 1884: Twelve Eventful Years ...* vol. 1 (London: Unwin Allen, 1919).

<sup>14</sup> John Wright, "A.T. Bryant and the 'Lala'," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 355-68.

scholars undertook translation of various interviews, songs, and stories.<sup>15</sup> It was during this period that a number of the primary sources for this study were translated into English, primarily the work of A.T. Cope, who wrote *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems*, published in 1968. The most useful and immense of these projects was the five-volume transcription, translation, and annotation that appeared between 1978 and 2001 as *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighboring Peoples* (hereafter JSA

).<sup>16</sup> This monumental work undertaken by John Wright and the late Colin B. Webb, offers a convenient point of access for historians to the works of colonial magistrate and commissioner James Stuart. Stuart meticulously recorded interviews conducted between 1894 and 1924, during his travels and work in British annexed KwaZulu, with the intention of creating a better understanding of pre-colonial Zulu culture. In translation and presentation these indispensable works are nevertheless products of their time, with certain limitations that we will explore shortly.

In the 1970s two important developments emerged changing the way that Zulu history was approached. First, notions of social equality, communal ownership and able leadership were emphasized in pre-colonial histories coinciding with the political

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<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 19; Carolyn Hamilton and John B. Wright, "The Making of the AmaLala: Ethnicity, Ideology and Relations of Subordination in a Precolonial Context," *South African Historical Journal* 22(1990): 3-23.

<sup>16</sup> Later volumes of the James Stuart Archive have been published quite recently, thus each installation, including the most recent in 2014, is correspondingly sensitive to the changing historical approaches of the last thirty years. The first five volumes have been consulted for this study. James Stuart, *The James Stuart archive of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and neighboring peoples*, ed. Colin de B. Webb, and John B. Wright, 5 vols. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976-2014), hereafter simply JSA.

growth of the Black Consciousness movement.<sup>17</sup> Second, a more material focus emerged, which sought to explain Zulu expansion through ecological, demographic and economic reasons. Of these works the most relevant to the current subject was Adam Kuper's study of bridewealth and marriage in Southern Africa.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Morris's presentation of women as an enslaved societal category, Kuper deconstructs the socio-political organization of the precolonial Zulu, to demonstrate the ways marriage was manipulated for social and political ends.<sup>19</sup>

Kuper's works would serve as part of a debate, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, surrounding the so-called *mfecane*, which had been attributed to warfare and particular cruelty on the part of the Zulu king Shaka kaSenzangakhona. This debate suggested that the *mfecane* may have been a false alibi for white settlers illegally procuring "depopulated" lands. In exploring this historical thesis, South Africanists more shrewdly examined the validity of sources of South African history produced in the 1800s.<sup>20</sup> Influenced by literary theorists, this shift questioned the way that historians

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<sup>17</sup> Jordan K. Ngubane, "Shaka's Social, Political and Military Ideas," in *Shaka, King of the Zulus in African Literature*, ed. Donald Burness (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1976), 127-62. For another example see Shula Marks, and Anthony Marks, *Economy and Society in Preindustrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Adam Kuper, "The 'House' and Zulu Political Structure in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 34 (1993): 469-87.

<sup>19</sup> Kuper, "The 'House,'" 473-9.

<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); see also Elizabeth Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, ca. 1800-30: The 'Mfecane' Reconsidered," *Journal of African History* 33, no. 1 (1992): 1-35; and Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 330-40.



approached sources as well as their content.<sup>21</sup> The discussion renewed a focus on examining the ideological bases of pre-colonial African societies and political economy.

The late 1990s and early twenty-first century have seen a reworking of the general narratives of Zulu history by multiple scholars to incorporate these and other shifts in understanding. These works have sought to temper some of the more melodramatic elements of histories written by Morris and other earlier historians. In 1994 Jeff Guy published *Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* as one of the first (though not the most radical) of the post-apartheid re-evaluations.<sup>22</sup> John Laband's *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation*, originally published as *Rope of Sand* in 1995, continues to provide the most comprehensive and rigorous pre-colonial history that is still sensitive to some of the sea changes in historiographical approach.<sup>23</sup> Laband's survey is augmented by other publications (including the Cambridge History of South Africa), which have looked into the more particular details of Zulu history, but remains one of the most relevant and comprehensive writings about the era as a whole. While Guy and Laband inevitably address women in some capacity, and even directly state the importance of recognizing their contributions, they remain secondary actors supporting and subsidizing tales of powerful men. Norman Etherington's *The Great Treks*, a germinal piece published in 2001, goes yet farther by upturning the notion that colonists

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<sup>21</sup> Julian Cobbing, "A Tainted Well. The Objectives, Historical Fantasies and Working Methods of James Stuart," *The Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 6 (1988): 115-54; Carolyn Hamilton, "Ideology, Oral Traditions, and the Struggle for Power in the Early Zulu Kingdom" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985), 422-64; John B. Wright, "Politics, Ideology and the Invention of the Nguni," in *Resistance and Ideology in Settler Societies*, Southern African Studies, ed. T. Lodge, vol. 4 (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986): 96-118; and John Wright, "A.T. Bryant and the 'Wars of Shaka,'" *History in Africa* 18 (1991): 409-25.

<sup>22</sup> Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War, 1879-1884* (University of Natal Press, 1994); Guy also more recently published several works on resistance to imperialism in the early twentieth century. See Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005); and most recently Jeff Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion: The Zulu Uprising of 1906* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*.

were exceptional participants and suggesting instead that they were, like kwaZulu, just one actor of many on the Southern Highveld. His work goes farther in recognizing the significance of women within the context of elite Zulu society, but still does not deeply explore the implications of their presence in the history to any great depth.

A host of following studies focused on the inventions, myths, and alterations of Zulu pre-colonial experience. They have become increasingly common, especially as post-Apartheid South Africa worked and continues to work through the pains of reconciling past and present in the Thukela River Valley. In a germinal contribution, Carolyn Hamilton's *Terrific Majesty* explores the tension held in the image of Shaka as an icon of Zulu nationalism and a symbol of African "tribalism," and is a thorough and well-grounded discussion of the validity of various sources of evidence. Her review of the traders at Port-Natal and the validity of their accounts of interactions with the Zulu during their formative period provides a reliable historiography of those particular works.<sup>24</sup> She also goes into detail about the reliability and motives of Theophilus Shepstone, the longtime Native Secretary of Natal, son of a missionary in the eastern Cape Colony, whose career in the colonial administration relied on understanding and ordering native groups and their power structures. He would use his knowledge of spoken isiZulu and access to the Zulu political sphere in order to create a system of governance that would expand colonial influence out from Natal and over the entire kwaZulu area.

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<sup>24</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 36-54.

## *Gendered Perspectives*

At the same time as the position of Zulu history within South Africa came in for reconsideration, so too did the question of gender in the various kingdoms of South Africa. Even in early contributions, the role of women is necessarily either discussed or implied, but often in a very limited or cursory fashion. In recent years, a growing number of works explicitly focus on the status of women and the state of gender roles in Zulu history. Arguably the first direct addressing of feminism in South African history was Belinda Bozzoli's 1983 article entitled, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies," which extended a metaphor of a "patchwork" of patriarchies stretching across nineteenth-century South Africa.<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Hamilton's M.A. thesis laid the groundwork for specific focus on Zulu society in 1985 in its chapter on "Women's Labor and Social Stratification in the Early Zulu State."<sup>26</sup> Other historians in the 1990s would expand on these works in as feminist ideology began to gain traction in scholarly circles.

The number of feminist historical articles expanded in the last two decades. However, it remains largely contained to creating theoretical frameworks for approaching Zulu gender dynamics, without examining the actual female figures in Zulu history. Jeff Guy outlined some of the more prominent concerns in the study of pre-colonial women in his contribution to Cherryl Walker's *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, which was published in 1990.<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge built on his, and Hamilton's foundation in her 1993 book, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth Century Lesotho*, and her 1991 article "Women in

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<sup>25</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 139-71.

<sup>26</sup> Hamilton, "Ideology, Oral Traditions," 422-64.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff Guy, "Gender Oppression in Africa's precapitalist societies" in, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, edited by Cherryl Walker (London: David Philip Publishers, 1990): 33-47.

Production, the Economic Role of Women in Nineteenth-century Lesotho.”<sup>28</sup> These both delved deeper into the socio-political and economic relationships between women and men in pre-colonial societies in South Africa. Sean Hanretta has also made a notable contribution in his 1998 article “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women’s Institutions of Power in the Early Nineteenth Century” pointing to potential for ascension as well as exploitation of elite female figures during what he considered period of political stratification in the early 1800s.<sup>29</sup>

Expansion in the field of historical Zulu feminism continued into the twenty-first century, but still remains limited to conceptual approaches. In 2005, Jennifer Weir contended that elite women in the nineteenth century had religiously significant roles, which were mobilized to unite peoples around a singular Zulu national identity in her perceptive piece “Whose Unkulunkulu?”<sup>30</sup> In one of the most recent pieces on this topic Sifiso Ndlovu contends the “oppressive” nature of women’s roles as espoused by Guy, pointing specifically to elite women as examples of empowered individuals with decision-making capabilities in the 2009 book *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu Past and Present*.<sup>31</sup> While a useful summary of existing scholarship, this book does not provide considerable new contributions for the precolonial era. Even Wright’s overview of 1760-1830 in the recent *Cambridge History of South Africa* relies on sources published

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth Century Lesotho* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Elizabeth Eldredge, “Women in Production: The Economic Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* (Summer 1991: Special issue on Women, Family, State and Economy in Africa): 707-31.

<sup>29</sup> Sean Hanretta, “Women, Marginality, and the Zulu State: Women’s Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 39, no. 3 (1998) 389-415.

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Weir, “Whose Unkulunkulu?” *Africa* 75, no. 2 (2005): 203-19.

<sup>31</sup> Sifiso Ndlovu, “A Reassessment of Women’s Power in the Zulu Kingdom,” in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton, John Laband, and Jabulani Sithole, (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 111-21.

twenty to thirty years ago, and largely overlooks prominent Zulu women.<sup>32</sup> The sparse nature of information about the elite women, and the lack of concrete analysis about their lives underscores how little has been done to adequately reconstruct a narrative of events in pre-colonial South African history from a gendered perspective.

Other works, such as Michael Mahoney's *The Other Zulus* published in 2012, approach the discourse from the twentieth century backwards, attempting to explain ways in which gendered and generational conflict originated in pre-colonial times.<sup>33</sup> However, his work and the scholarship it is based off of, is founded on conceptualizing Zulu history that occurred largely after the fall of the Zulu royal family. It also relies on conceptualizing changes in the perceptions of non-elite Zulu people, and explaining the rise of "Zuluness" as a concept of ethnic self-identification. Elite Zulu women, while alluded to, are therefore largely obscured as individuals in this vein of study as well.

The most recent and comprehensive contribution to conception of Zulu women in pre-colonial history comes in Elizabeth Eldredge's meticulous history of the very early period of Zulu power consolidation. In her 2015 book, she provides a chapter relating the roles of specific women in power and their relationship with Shaka kaSenzangakhona.<sup>34</sup> Her assessment provides the most holistic account to date of the relationships of elite women and the ruling men, emphasizing that women "exerted considerable control over their own lives and affairs within the private sphere and influence over public affairs in various realms."<sup>35</sup> She also contends that the degree to

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<sup>32</sup> John Wright, "Turbulent Times: Political Transformations in the North and East, 1760s-1830s," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa* vol. 1, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard K. Mbenga, and Robert Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 211-52.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Mahoney, *The Other Zulus: The Spread of Zulu Ethnicity in Colonial South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 172-205.

<sup>35</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 202.

which women were able to make decisions and gain individual status was tempered by a political organization that was structured to ensure and perpetuate male authority.

Eldredge posits that while not wholly oppressive as it has been termed by scholars like Theal and Morris, the experience of royal women cannot be removed from its context in a social and legal setting of female dependence.

Eldredge's book focuses on the events of Shaka kaSenzangakhona's rule, and while some statements she makes can be applied across Zulu history, it remains limited in its narrative scope. Up to this point, there remain to be any significant works that address the lives of individual elite women after Shaka's death, or attempt to analyze the status of women in the Zulu royal family as a narrative arc across the course of Zulu pre-colonial history.

### **Survey of Primary Sources**

The primary sources this section explores provide the basis of evidence used in the following discussion. In efforts to capture the 'customs' and 'traditions' of the Zulu and other people living in kwaZulu and surrounding areas, colonial officials of European descent made many detailed maps, dictionaries, pictures, and representations. These sometimes captured local knowledge and other times erased it by excluding elements that did not seem relevant to a colonial audience.<sup>36</sup> By and large, these representations have created a false impression that the history of the Zulu was already known. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians like Theal and Bryant assumed that the ways indigenous peoples recorded and understood their

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<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 36-72.

own past was not factual.<sup>37</sup> Their writings denied the knowledge systems of conquered peoples as history; instead, they and other colonizing forces endeavored to create their own versions of the past that privileged colonial documentation and archival information.

Modern historians must rely heavily on the writings of European colonizers and traders, because they remain some of the only surviving contemporary evidence; however, it is critical that each source be examined within its own context for biases of a Eurocentric worldview. Early historians distinguished knowledge produced by Europeans, or settlers of European descent, as secular and therefore more reliable, even when produced by missionary agents, who had a very visible agenda.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the conceptualizations and lived experiences of native peoples themselves. This created a false dichotomy between the histories of the colonies and that of Britain proper, when in fact these histories existed in dialogue with one another.

### *Early Trader Accounts*

The earliest accounts from European writers about contact with the Zulu come from traders in the Port of Natal. Dutch settlers arrived on the South African Cape in the mid-seventeenth century, and British forces installed a permanent colonial rule in the Eastern Cape in 1806. The Dutch and Portuguese had frequented the Indian Ocean for centuries before, and occasionally shipwreck survivors left hints of the peoples they encountered along the coast. However, it was after the English established their formal

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Theal, *History of South Africa*; Alfred T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London and New York: Longsmans Green and Co, 1929).

<sup>38</sup> See for example, the large body of work produced by missionaries to kwaZulu in the 1800s. Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 20-28.

colony in the Cape that traders seriously turned to the East African Coast, and more extensive writings on Zulu and other East African peoples emerged.

Henry Francis Fynn provides the earliest of a few more substantial accounts about interactions with the Zulu in particular. Fynn's *Diary* details his recollections of his experiences as a trader from 1824-1836.<sup>39</sup> Although the original version was purportedly buried with his late brother, Fynn is thought to have finished the writings between 1831 and 1833.<sup>40</sup> The book was given to James Stuart for editing, but was not finished until Daniel Malcolm did the final editing and publishing in 1950.<sup>41</sup> Fynn's full participation in the African society he found there, even marrying and having children with African women, suggest that he was maybe somewhat sympathetic to the people he encountered and might portray them with some sensitivity.<sup>42</sup> On the whole, his book paints a largely positive image of the African people he met. He describes the common African people in a positive light, despite describing their king as a despotic ruler. Fynn's descriptions of the Zulu Royal family are fairly general; however, and with the exception of his account of the death of Nandi he provides limited insight.

Nathaniel Isaacs, Fynn's partner in the ivory trade, did not similarly understand the African People on the Eastern Coast. A much less reliable source, Isaacs was personally invested in British expansion from the Cape Colony for ivory trade and, in a letter, encouraged Fynn to make "them" out to be "as bloodthirsty as you can."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Francis Fynn, *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, ed. James Stuart and D. McK. Malcolm (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1950).

<sup>40</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Malcom, "Historical Introduction," in *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, i-xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Eldredge *Creation*, 19. For further reading on the validity of Fynn as a source, see Julie Pridmore, "Diaries and Dispatches: The Life and Writing of Henry Francis Fynn (1803–61) and Henry Francis Fynn Junior (1846–1915)" *Kleio* 36, 1 (2004): 126-47; and Dan Wylie, "Proprietor of Natal: Henry Francis Fynn and the Mythography of Shaka," *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 409–37.

<sup>43</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 17.



Shipwrecked in the Port of Natal on an ill-fated ivory trading expedition, Isaacs was repeatedly stranded on the Eastern Coast until, after establishing a network of ivory traders and rebuilding a ship Isaacs left in 1827, he returned three years later with Fynn to conduct a successful ivory trading business. Isaacs's concern in protecting his business led to his appeal to Fynn to make Shaka out to be bloodthirsty, and the publication of his own writings in *South African Commercial Advertiser* was intended to encourage British Expansion farther into Zulu territory.<sup>44</sup> His writings are notable, but provide little where not substantiated by other African sources, and are fairly sparse in terms of specific detail relating to *amakhosikazi* and Zulu women.

Charles Rawden Maclean, called "John Ross" by Fynn and others, was a teenage boy on Fynn's ill-fated expedition in 1826 who was taken in by Shaka while Fynn and others undertook the reconstruction of a boat in Port Natal.<sup>45</sup> During his three-year stay with the Zulu royal family, Ross gained some of the most valuable insights into the workings of Zulu society and governance that can be found in these sources. As a young man, he developed a great affection for his African hosts and lived among them in Shaka's capital, Bulawayo, where he even was permitted to visit the women's quarters. Ross spent his adult life as a trader, but remembered his "old friends" and recounted some of the stories that he had heard from elderly men about the early wars of Shaka, as well as stories from before their own lifetimes. Ross/Maclean's account carries great credibility in its sympathies to the Zulu people and separation from the commercial motives of either Fynn or Isaacs, but it is not as rich in detail as the account of Fynn, nor does Ross often speak explicitly of his interactions with the royal women. Even so,

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<sup>44</sup> Nathaniel Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa: Descriptive of the Zoolus their Manners and Customs* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1836).

<sup>45</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 20-21.

some of his insights can substantiate claims in the accounts of Zulu informants themselves.

### *Missionary Documents and Travelogues*

In addition to these firsthand accounts by traders, we have written travelogues by early English settlers and missionaries. One of the most heavily relied upon authors has been Alfred T. Bryant, a missionary to KwaZulu in 1883 and an English priest. His *Zulu-English Dictionary* includes a “Concise History of the Zulu People,” which offers many assertions about migrations of peoples, blatant exaggerations, and imaginative embellishments that have since been overturned by countervailing evidence.<sup>46</sup> Although his writings were purportedly based on personal interviews with various African peoples that he met during his time as a missionary, these interviews were not well recorded in his notes and are suspect as primary evidence.<sup>47</sup> Bryant even admits in his introduction to “a considerable sprinkling of authors’ inaccuracies and printer’s errors.”<sup>48</sup>

Bryant’s primary concern was to entertain the European readers of his work in the exotic African history, especially in *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*. The state ethnographer N.J. van Warmelo called *Olden Times* in particular “fanciful” as early as the 1970s.<sup>49</sup> Hamilton and Wright have since shown that much of Bryant’s writing in *Olden Times* was based on secondary sources already available, which he inconsistently

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<sup>46</sup> Alfred T. Bryant, *A Zulu-English Dictionary* (Durban: Davis & Sons, 1905). For a more lengthy discussion of the inaccuracies of Bryant’s works, see John Wright, “A.T. Bryant and the ‘Lala,’” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012), 355-68.

<sup>47</sup> Malcolm writes about Bryant’s interviews as the principal source of information for his historical writings, D. Mck. Malcolm, “Obituary,” *African Studies* 12, no. 3(1953): 131-32.

<sup>48</sup> Bryant, *Dictionary*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Bryant, *Olden Times*; N.J. van Warmelo, “The Classification of Cultural Groups,” in *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, ed. W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 61.

analyzed under a flawed methodology.<sup>50</sup> Considering these flaws, Bryant serves as an interesting piece to contrast the interviews and other more primary documentation in the JSA; however, this study endeavors to avoid relying on his contributions especially considering his failure to discuss women except in relation to their position as ‘concubines’ or in polygyny.<sup>51</sup>

Bryant does not offer the only missionary voice that weighed in on the subject of Zulu history. Missionary projects to the colonies generally recorded accounts of their efforts, often very meticulously, in order to keep people (and donors) at home informed about their endeavors. One such figure was Bishop John William Colenso, the first Bishop of the Church of England in Natal, who particularly undertook these efforts as a counter-narrative to official imperial documentation of Zulu history and political writings that generally celebrated Zulu military prowess and denigrated other aspects of the culture and governance. Born in 1814, Colenso trained at Cambridge University before moving to Natal to start a diocese near Pietermaritzburg at the behest of Bishop Robert Gray in 1852.<sup>52</sup>

On his own printing press, John Colenso, and later his sons and daughters, with the help of William Ngidi and other converts to his church, sought to expose the tyrannical nature of colonial governance in Natal.<sup>53</sup> Sympathetic to the Zulu royal household, Colenso endeavored to learn as much as he could about Zulu politics and to assist the royal family in pursuing justice after mistreatment by British officials. As early as 1859, he harbored a number of hopefuls for the Zulu throne, and later even

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<sup>50</sup> Wright, “A.T. Bryant and the ‘Lala,’” 355-368.

<sup>51</sup> Bryant, *Olden Times*, 636-40.

<sup>52</sup> For a sympathetic look at Colenso’s life see Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John Colenso 1814-1883* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> Guy, *The Heretic*, 121-54.

traveled to England as part of a successful campaign to return the exiled Cetshwayo to KwaZulu after the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879. Later in his career, Colenso became controversial for his criticism of the Pentateuch, a change of mind he attributed to Ngidi and the logic of other African converts.<sup>54</sup> Excommunicated by Bishop Gray for heresy, Colenso, and his daughters Hariette and Jane, strove to expose the Colonial Administration of Natal as forceful and prejudiced throughout the late 1800s. The contributions by the Colenso family are useful in that they provide a different vantage point than most colonial accounts, from which to view the Zulu royal family.<sup>55</sup> Their correspondences, publications, and various interviews provide powerful pieces that advocated for and wrote from a viewpoint more sensitive to the lives of African people all around them. Although Bishop Colenso and his daughter Harriette were more intimately concerned with the political position of the Zulu Kings, they do include insightful statements about elite women's lives in their works.

### *The James Stuart Archive*

James Stuart is the compiler of the richest and most relied-upon source for this study. Born in 1868 in Pietermaritzburg, Stuart grew up speaking isiZulu and was employed as an interpreter by age 20 for the fledgling colonial administration in the recently annexed KwaZulu.<sup>56</sup> After this point, Stuart spent over twenty years in various imperial positions, but most consistently as a magistrate. Stuart's methods were heavily

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<sup>54</sup> Jeff Guy, "Class, Imperialism and Literary Criticism: William Ngidi, John Colenso and Matthew Arnold," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 219-41.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the Colenso family's contributions to politics in KwaZulu and Natal, see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 112-13; For a biography of Harriette Colenso, see Jeff Guy, *A View Across the River: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle Against Imperialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> JSA, 1:xiii-xix. Brief biographies of James Stuart can also be found in Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 130-167.

influenced by the political ideals of Theophilus Shepstone.<sup>57</sup> In an illustrative installment, Shepstone's last treatise, published in *The Natal Mercury* in 1892, warns "short cuts which ignore the great gulf that separates the social and political ideas of the two races must sooner or later bring disaster."<sup>58</sup> According to Shepstone, this gulf could be crossed only through the complete understanding and appropriation of indigenous power and social structures into the laws and social orders of an imperial administration to ensure control and order. Shepstone achieved his goal of incorporating some particular forms of 'native logics' into his governing practices, but in the process he took on a liberal and more dictatorial approach to overseeing black Africans' lives. In any case, Stuart took Shepstone's principles to heart, writing in his notebook that the colonial administration needed a "good reliable Zulu scholar...entirely independent of the Natal Government" on whom to rely for information and opinion regarding Native Law.<sup>59</sup>

In some ways, Stuart endeavored to play this role himself. Starting in the late 1890s, Stuart began meticulously documenting oral interviews with native people in KwaZulu, rising from a need to understand issues in the court he presided over. In the following 25 years, Stuart conducted almost 200 interviews and wrote a history of the Bambatha Rebellion, a Zulu orthography and writing methods piece, a study of

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<sup>57</sup> For an excellent analysis of Shepstone's role as a colonial administrator, see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 72-129. See also Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African Autonomy and Settler Colonialism in the Making of Traditional Authority* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> *Natal Mercury*, April 1, 1892, quoted in Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 130.

<sup>59</sup> JSA, 1:230.

“customs and laws,” and several readers in isiZulu.<sup>60</sup> His notes and journals, now translated and published as the James Stuart Archive, offer rich insight, but also a complex set of sourcing issues.

This collection is extensive. It covers everything from before 1800 to the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion, as well as marriage rituals, burial practices, economic functions, patronage systems, reactions to conquest, religion, grievances, and more. In 1988, Julian Cobbing conducted a scathing review of the flaws of Stuart as a source of primary evidence in his piece “A Tainted Well: The Objectives, Historical Fantasies and Working Methods of James Stuart.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, a passage written by Stuart in a personal notebook in 1902 sheds some light on the potential problematics posed in his approach to collecting these interviews:

“My object is to collect native custom so universally and thoroughly as to become an authority on it and compare it with existing legislation.... All will then be bound to come to my well to drink.”<sup>62</sup>

Cobbing warns that Stuart’s well may be poisonous. He points to examples of European works which “ventriloquize the African voice.”<sup>63</sup> In particular, Cobbing notes the use of falsified “traditions” and “oral histories” by Europeans (or European descendants) as justification for illegal land grabbing. While this is an obvious concern, it is clear from the archive itself that Stuart’s method of transcription was extremely precise, at times transcribing the words of his interviewees verbatim and going to great lengths to clear up discrepancies and confusion with his informants.

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<sup>60</sup> James Stuart, *Studies in Zulu Law and Custom* (Durban: Robinson & Co., 1903); James Stuart, *The Conjunctive and Subjunctive Methods of Writing Zulu* (Durban, 1906); James Stuart (ed.), *Zulu Orthography* (Durban: Robinson & Co., 1907); James Stuart, *A History of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906, and of Dinuzulu’s Arrest, Trial and Expatriation* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913).

<sup>61</sup> Cobbing, “A Tainted Well.”

<sup>62</sup> JSA, 1:xiv.

<sup>63</sup> Cobbing, “A Tainted Well,” 119.

It also seems extreme to accuse Stuart of solely undergoing a project to further his own political and social ambitions through racist and falsified history. He is, after all, a human being, with all of the accompanying ambiguity and duality. This is apparent in his writings, where he might both proclaim the superiority of Europeans and call for equal opportunity for Africans in the same passage.<sup>64</sup> Carolyn Hamilton maintains that Stuart had a double front: a paternalistic imperial commissioner in public, and an exploratory sympathizer to the plight of African peoples in private.<sup>65</sup> Given his conflicting goals, Stuart's interviews must be carefully dissected; however, due to the exacting nature of his methodology and the relative lack of alternative sources, the JSA remains an invaluable source of information.

This study uses those accounts extensively as a source of information, with the aim of retaining as close as possible a link to the actual events and people involved. Unfortunately, his notes do not provide a gender-balanced insight into the world he operated in. The colonies did not recognize Zulu women as equal to their male counterparts in the court of law, even one designed to be sensitive to their cultures. Stuart's transcripts are therefore limited.

#### *Official Documentation and Izibongo*

As was typical of the British Empire, administrators produced a mountain of official documentation. Of particular use in this study, these included the Natal Blue Books and Reports by the Native Affairs Commissioner. These documents present a look at the lives of the Zulu as seen by the British and Natal Parliaments and officials, but are also necessarily combined with the British imperial agenda. In some instances,

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<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 165.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 138.

this agenda saw fit to discard or embellish elements of Zulu history to further their own political goals, and was ultimately engaged in dismantling the Zulu government and discrediting the Zulu Royal Family while diminishing or fracturing it. Some of these documents do discuss African women, but in the scope of this study, a full survey is impossible. Where the documents speak at length, women rarely vocalize their own experiences. British officials saw fit to describe the actions of the women, though these are often incomplete descriptions, and little was done to clarify details or contradicting evidence.

Independently, or perhaps simultaneously, as Theal and others created a Western historical narrative, Zulu peoples continued to create and disseminate their own forms of knowledge. In particular, oral histories in the forms of praise poems passed knowledge of the past from generation to generation. These poems, or *isibongo* (pl. *izibongo*), acted as a storehouse of social and cultural memory within Zulu society.<sup>66</sup> James Stuart collected *izibongo* that were used in his readers and later translated by Anthony Trevor Cope.<sup>67</sup> The *izibongo* that relate to the royal women Nandi and Mnkabayi were included in this collection, and are thus extremely relevant in this study.

*Izibongo* are useful in that they offer a glimpse of Zulu history from the perspective and in the words of Zulu people themselves. However, they also are difficult to analyze, even by native speakers, given the intervening time and loss of cultural memory.<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that an *isibongo* could serve as a forum for political slander and may not be intended to be unbiased in nature. The poems that

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<sup>66</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 210-12.

<sup>67</sup> A.T. Cope, ed. *Izibongo: Zulu Praise-poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>68</sup> For more on *izibongo* in their current form and on historical changes see Liz Gunner and Mafika Gwala, trans and ed., "Introduction," in *Musho! Zulu Popular Praises* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 1-52.



Stuart collected were from only a particular population (those with access to a White British official) and not exhaustive in nature, thus while they provide insights they cannot be taken as comprehensive. Any competing versions or views may have been lost to time or simply remain unrecorded. Considering that over a century has passed between the content of this study and the present day, current *izibongo* will not be considered, although they may provide powerful insights into the way the vein of historiography preserved in oral histories has evolved over time. They may also reveal insights about the lesser-known *amakhosikazi* that have been erased from archival accounts. While recognizing these documents as a potential source for later projects, this thesis can only begin to investigate them.

This paper will explore a fairly large variety of sources in order to reach conclusions about the experiences and positions of the royal *amakhosikazi*, due, largely, to the scarcity of written evidence. However, in spite of this incomplete body of evidence, a general tenor of the lives of *amakhosikazi* can be interpreted through the clutter of colonization, political upheaval, slavery, and marginalization. In some instances, individual figures or stories may be drawn out to illuminate particular aspects of the experience of *amakhosikazi* or explore spaces where they had access to agency. It is to these figures and the arc of their experiences that this paper now turns.

## Part 1: Nozidiya and Early Times to 1827

### *Historical Overview*

The house of Zulu, known in the early nineteenth century as *abakwaZulu*, or “people of the place of Zulu,” began its ascendancy in the early 1800s, as one of a number of powerful African clan groups whose power rested on their ability to exert some control over economic, political and social in their local regions. At the turn of the century the Zulu clan was a small tributary chiefdom under the supervision of Senzangakhona. Located south of the Mflozi River, Senzangakhona and his people were subordinate to the larger and more powerful amaMthwethwa, led by Dingiswayo. In his early years, Senzangakhona’s son Shaka went to serve under Dingiswayo. Later, when an opportunity became available, Dingiswayo, and several *amakhosikazi*, aided Shaka in securing his father’s position.<sup>69</sup> In the meantime Dingiswayo had to contend with his rival Zwide, the powerful ruler of the amaNdwandwe. The exact circumstances of Zwide and Dingiswayo’s decline are a subject for further investigation, but most hold that Zwide conquered Dingiswayo on the battlefield.<sup>70</sup> Shortly after, for uncertain reasons, Zwide and the amaNdwandwe lost power due, perhaps, in part to failed efforts to conquer Shaka and the amaZulu, but also as a result of factioning within the amaNdwandwe elites.<sup>71</sup> What is certain is that in the following ten years, Shaka consolidated his tributaries and became the preeminent leader in the region. It was at

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<sup>69</sup> The current historical understanding, including that written by John Wright in the *Cambridge History of South Africa*, holds that Dingiswayo was responsible for nominating and supporting Shaka to become the next Zulu inkhosi. However, as later evidence shows, Shaka also received the strong support of certain amakhosikazi, which helped garner support from within the Zulu family. Wright, “Turbulent Times,” 227.

<sup>70</sup> There is some contention over whether Shaka held back his military support of Dingiswayo in an attempt to escape their tributary status, and as a result his tutor fell in battle. Wright, “Turbulent Times,” 229.

<sup>71</sup> Wright, “Turbulent Times,” 226-9.

this time that the traders Nathaniel Isaacs, Henry Francis Fynn and John Ross (Maclean) shipwrecked on the coast. Under this new chief, or *inkhosi*, the Zulu royal house would become one of the dominant clans, spreading out from a fairly stable center of power over the following six decades. Shaka's rule would not last, however, and in 1828 he was assassinated by two of his brothers in pursuit of his throne.

Historians as a whole have made great changes to understanding of the Zulu kingdom's origins in the past several decades.<sup>72</sup> Amongst these is a new appreciation for the late 1700s to early 1800s as a period of political consolidation throughout the region north of the Orange River, but east of the Kalahari Desert.<sup>73</sup> Recent scholarship suggests that in this time of increased contact with Portuguese ivory traders and regional chiefs led these chiefs to consolidate their control of cattle and land. In order to do so they increasingly called for and relied on labor of *amabutho*, age-sets of men and women brought together for social, political, and military reasons. The consolidation of states to the North encouraged others to respond in kind. However, these 'states' were extremely fluid. The traditional narratives, settlerist, Zuluist and nationalist, have greatly exaggerated the extent of Zulu hegemony from 1816 onward.<sup>74</sup> In reality, the Zulu kingdom emerged as an amalgamation of multiple hereditary chiefdoms each under its own individual ruling house. The Zulu royal family was dominant, but various local and fairly independent rulers could still check the house's power.<sup>75</sup> In this system the women in dominant families held important roles that were not as inflexible as has been held by historians in the past. The historical narrative in the preceding paragraph

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<sup>72</sup> Most notably the debate surrounding the mfecane, but also notions of the effect of Slavery in Delagoa Bay on the surrounding African populations. See Wright, "Turbulent Times," 224-28.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, "Turbulent Times," 224-28.

<sup>74</sup> Wright, "Turbulent Times," 228.

<sup>75</sup> Wright, "Turbulent Times," 230.

focuses on the Zulu kingship, but this is largely due to reliance on works which center around his life. However as will be shown, there is also a great deal of evidence to suggest the significance of great women in early Zulu history.

### **Nozidiya and Other Precedents for Queen Mothers**

The very first *inkhosikazi* to appear in Zulu oral traditions is Nozidiya, the mother of the amaZulu progenitor Zulu himself.<sup>76</sup> According to the traditions Nozidiya favored Zulu over her elder son Qwabe. She used the profits she made from selling food to purchase livestock for Zulu, thus offending Qwabe who left with his followers to begin a different chiefdom (the neighboring abaQwabe).<sup>77</sup> Regardless of accuracy, this story shows a high degree of autonomy for a royal woman as the mother of authority, and indicates that her role was pivotal in the resulting rift between brothers.

Contrary to historian Sean Hanretta's claim that women's leadership was a novel creation tied to the early 1800s, Nozidiya's favoritism was the catalyst for the split and offers precedent for female influence in the male dominated realm of political and military might from the infancy of the kingdom. Oral histories do not portray all women in the pre-Shakan era as holding their own wealth and distributing it at will. However, this story alone indicates the existence of agency on the part of royal elite women, and particularly the *amakhosikazi* in the distant Zulu past. Historians writing about the distant past, in what might even be pre-Zulu history, however, reported nothing about these examples other than information on royal marriages. Where women do appear in stories from prior to 1816 it is largely in relation to succession and their

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<sup>76</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 361; see also Bryant, *Olden Times*, 186.

<sup>77</sup> JSA, 2:226.

lineage.<sup>78</sup> All the same, even with the scant information available, the evidence produces a glimpse of royal women's experience before Zulu ascendancy.

One repeated arc in the history of kwaZulu before Shaka involves sending a young heir to live with his mother's family for protection.<sup>79</sup> Potential heirs were generally in danger, because of their position as contenders for the chieftaincy. In polygynous royal households multiple queens with multiple children all lived in close proximity, and tension between half-brothers and their mothers' whole families could prove deadly. Dingiswayo, who later would become the paramount chief of the regionally powerful amaMthwethwa, almost died in the toxic politics of the royal household. A mother of a different potential heir told his father that Dingiswayo was plotting to assassinate him. The chief, turning on Dingiswayo, chased him down and stabbed him. In a narrow escape, his sister nursed him back to health and helped him to escape to his mother's family.<sup>80</sup>

Whether or not Dingiswayo actually had an assassination threat, in this account he was nearly killed by the well-placed words of an *inkhosikazi* hoping to strengthen her own son's potential for chieftaincy. Powerful women within the ruling household, both *amakhosikazi* (mothers) and *amakhosazana* (sisters), drive the action in this story, and are shown to be capable of both endangering, and later rescuing Dingiswayo. Although they may not have been eligible for succession themselves, the elite women within the royal household were intimately involved in the contest for power, here most clearly

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<sup>78</sup> This could be due to the early Historian's obsession with charting the lineages of Zulu families. Stuart, and Bryant, asked many questions about the lineages of different informants. Lineage is very important in Zulu social structure, but the British would interestingly completely ignore it in later policies of indirect rule.

<sup>79</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 179.

<sup>80</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 179.

through their ability to propagate rumors and uncertainty. This story provides an example of how in ruling households the chiefs' sons and potential heirs relied on their female family members to ensure that they would claim a place of power, and how an *inkhosikazi* might be able to use rumor, gossip or hearsay to influence her spouse.

Daughters and wives provided an essential link between various powerful families. Lines of descent connected the future of both houses and *ilobola*, the bride-price or marriage fee, guaranteed that children belonged to her husband's household and enriched the wives' family with cattle. South African anthropologist Adam Kuper notes that "In their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, women created and reproduced important political ruling houses and alliances."<sup>81</sup> Homesteads were composed of clusters of wives and heirs in separate smaller households within a larger complex, called an *umuzi* (pl. *imizi*). The homestead as a whole was controlled by the male household head, who generally oversaw the cattle, while the wives and children participated in agricultural production, and household reproduction both biological and cultural.<sup>82</sup> Over the course of time the clusters of heirs and wives became increasingly autonomous, particularly after the death of the patriarch, as sons grew up and began creating *imizi* of their own. In elite circles of ruling families wives from outside the immediate household produced the heirs and often raised them away from the ruling house, and the incumbent danger demonstrated in the story of Nozidiya. Wives who married into the homestead might come from a different ruling household sufficiently

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<sup>81</sup> Adam Kuper, "The 'House' and Zulu Political Structure in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, 24 (1993): 483. See also Elizabeth Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 126-146.

<sup>82</sup> These large *imizi* were the foundation of the larger states/kingdoms which had emerged during the late 1700s. For a closer description of the workings of these homesteads, see John Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 1995), 7-17, 39-42.

removed to ensure genetic variability. Their marriage could cement alliances between different ruling houses, produce heirs, and provide valuable labor to grow food.

However, intermarriage between houses was not necessarily friendly. Women held a vulnerable position without familial protection in their husband's homes, and men sometimes allowed the progeny of rivals into their beds. Oral histories report that Zwide, paramount chief of the amaNdwandwe, finally bested his rival, Dingiswayo (mentioned above), through his daughter. After Zwide offered his daughter to Dingiswayo in marriage, she stole some of Dingiswayo's semen to make a concoction that would help her father defeat her new husband. This concoction weakened Dingiswayo and gave Zwide the opportunity to defeat his enemy in battle.<sup>83</sup> Whether or not the magic was a real factor, Dingiswayo did die in this 1817 battle that reduced the capacity of the *amaMthwethwa*.

This particular story highlights the vulnerability that heads of ruling families exposed themselves to in allowing the daughters of their rivals into their beds, but also the potential power they hoped to gain—and the ability of women in elite circles to access power. Harriet Ngubane in *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine* indicates that an aspect of male power was to control reproductive fluids; therefore, removing the semen without consent upsets this aspect of male power.<sup>84</sup> This interpretation of male potency would explain the logic behind the practice of abstaining from practices that involve the loss of potency prior to activities that would require male prowess, such as hunting, blacksmithing and war. While the chief or king ultimately controlled his royal households, this story is suggestive of the level of vulnerability royal men had when

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<sup>83</sup> JSA, 2:185-6.

<sup>84</sup> Harriette Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (Waltham: Academic Premier, 1977), 93.

engaged in intercourse as well as an opportunity for women to exert influence. In that moment, this form of “male power” was extracted and (in at least the case of Dingiswayo) could be used against powerful male rulers.<sup>85</sup> Intermarriage, or at least sexual congress, was both a tool for alliance and a chance for rival households to insert themselves into their enemy’s homes.

### **Mnkabayi: Current Discussion of her Femininity**

One of the most famous and well-studied *inkhosikazi* was Mnkabayi the older sister of chief Senzangakhona and powerful Zulu woman. Historian John Laband calls this woman the “king-maker,” for she was the sister to one ruling man and aunt to two others.<sup>86</sup> Mnkabayi is potentially the most influential woman in pre-colonial Zulu history for her role in succession disputes from the late 1700s through the 1830s. She is recognized in her praises as:

Little mouse that started the runs at Malandela’s  
And thought it was the people of Malandela  
Who would thereby walk along all the paths.<sup>87</sup>

The praise calls Mnkabayi a little mouse, but although small, it is she who “starts the runs” or the process that would lead to the Zulu house (*abakwaZulu*) to supremacy in the region. She had the original vision that it would be the “people of Malandela” who would “walk along all the paths.”<sup>88</sup> Here it is Mnkabayi who is credited with the vision of Zulu preeminence. She played a significant role in three successions, saw the rise of

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<sup>85</sup> Paul Bjerk, “They Poured themselves into the Milk: Zulu Political Philosophy under Shaka,” *Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 10. Bjerk draws links to a “story of the Hlubi country” and suggests that sexual intercourse was seen as a form of “milking a man.”

<sup>86</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Cope, *Izibongo*, 172.

<sup>88</sup> For an interesting interpretation of Mnkabayi’s poem see Norma Masuku, “The depiction of Mnkabayi: A Review of her praise poem,” *South African Journal of African Language*, 29 no. 2 (2009): 121-30.



the Zulu kingdom to eminence, and oversaw an *ikhanda* (pl. *amakhanda*) or regimental royal settlement in the northwestern part of the kingdom. The *amakhanda* were large settlements where *amakhosikazi* and other high-ranking members of the royal family, oversaw local *amabutho*, or age-set regiments, and cattle holdings. They served as centers of Zulu familial authority in different localities and cites for commerce, ceremony, and military mobilization.<sup>89</sup>

The first story indicating Mnkabayi's authoritative role follows the death of Jama, her father and chief of the amaZulu from 1763 to 1781. Mnkabayi served as regent for her younger brother Senzangakhona (father of Shaka), who had been chosen for the chieftaincy. She was co-regent with Mudhli, her half-brother, who was not eligible for the position of chief. In the mid-to-late eighteenth century, a woman serving as regent was fairly common. There are multiple examples of Nguni-speaking communities wherein an *inkhosikazi* might serve as regent to a young chief.<sup>90</sup> Mnkabayi was Senzangakhona's full sister, and therefore had a vested interest in her brother's success as a way to maintain her matriclan's position in power. She was an unusual regent, in that she was the sister and not the aunt of Senzangakhona, and in that her brother was in his twenties at the time of his ascendancy.<sup>91</sup>

After Jama's death, Senzangakhona's position was very tenuous. He was still fairly young and although the Zulu Kingdom was still a small chieftaincy of many tributaries to Dingiswayo and the amaMthethwa, there were still those within the family who would wrest control from the new chief. Mntaniya was the mother of both

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<sup>89</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> John Laband gives his birth as 1757 and his formal succession as 1781, making Senzangakhona 24 years old at the start of his chieftaincy. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 16.

Senzangakhona and Mnkabayi. After becoming widowed, she married Vubkulwayo, her late husband's brother (a fairly common practice). Unfortunately for her children, her new husband had his sights set on his nephew's position. Vubkulwayo may not have had the right to do so, but the selection process for selecting the familial chief was subject to contention as long as enough popular support existed.

In one story Vubkulwayo sent poisoned beer to Senzangakhona, in the hopes that his son with Mntaniya might become chief.<sup>92</sup> Mnkabayi was able to intercept the tainted drink and returned it to Vubkulwayo and his mother, who (in this version) perished by their own concoction. Dan Wylie, a literary critic who extensively analyzed myths about Shaka Zulu and the royal family, has disputed the accuracy of this story because of its cruelty. In response, Elizabeth Eldredge, who wrote the most recent and comprehensive history of the early origins of the Zulu kingdom, has pointed out that interfamily violence is hardly a reason to disregard a story.<sup>93</sup> Mntaniya, however, appears in later stories so it is likely that this story is confused at least in its conclusion. The existence of various strands of the story also gives rise to questions about what purpose such a tale may have served for those sharing it. In any case, there is an agreement about the depth to which Senzangakhona literally owes his rule to Mnkabayi, and the ways that chief's wives, sisters, and aunts politicked in the hopes that their male family member might succeed.

Historians seeking to understand Mnkabayi have redefined the conceptualization of her character in the past 30 years. Early materialist feminist approaches presented

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<sup>92</sup> JSA, 3:49.

<sup>93</sup> Wylie essentially dismisses the possibility of Mntaniya poisoning her own child. Dan Wylie, *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 30-31. Eldredge criticizes this approach as lacking evidence, and is far more convincing in her interpretation; see Eldredge, *Creation*, 363.

Mnkabayi as a benign queen mother who cooperated passively under a patriarchal Zulu chieftaincy.<sup>94</sup> However this interpretation has been more recently disputed in newer readings by Ndlovu, Hanretta, and Weir, which examine some of the nuanced tensions that existed between the chiefs and this “king-maker.”<sup>95</sup>

Some recent works have engaged in a discussion about Mnkabayi’s status as a radical feminist.<sup>96</sup> These analyses center on Mnkabayi as a person who, “defied all odds and placed herself on par with men and the elite group that governed the Zulu monarchy,” or that she exhibited “the same cardinal virtues as men.”<sup>97</sup> While Mnkabayi is one of the only women to be remembered in Stuart’s Zulu readers, evidence from closer to her time period disputes the notion that she stood alone, or that power could only flow from male sources. Other *amakhosikazi* held positions of high esteem as religiously significant women, garnered large followings, and partook of general political exchanges. Mnkabayi’s actions are most often mentioned in conjunction with those of her sisters, although she is clearly implicated as the leader.<sup>98</sup> Mnkabayi led her generation of *amakhosikazi* through the rise and fall of three Zulu rulers.

Others argue Mnkabayi was a feminist because she embodied supposedly unfeminine characteristics. For example, Shamase states, “[Mnkabayi] was never

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<sup>94</sup> Jeff Guy, “Gender and oppression in Southern African Pre-Capitalist Societies,” *Journal of Southern African Societies* 14 (1987-1988): 33-47; and Cherryl Walker, “Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c. 1850-1930,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cherryl Walker (London: David Philip Publishers, D. Philip, 1990), 168-96.

<sup>95</sup> Gunner, “Mnkabayi,” 254.

<sup>96</sup> See Norma Masuku, “The depiction of Mnkabayi: A Review of her praise poem,” *South African Journal of African Language* 29, no. 2 (2009): 121-30. See also Maxwell Zakhele Shamase, “Princess Mnkabayi kaJama of the Zulu Monarchy Through the Keyhole of Oral History,” in *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 6 (2014): 12.

<sup>97</sup> Shamase, “Princess Mnkabayi,” 12.

<sup>98</sup> One example being the description of Dingane’s absolution after murdering Shaka wherein both Mnkabayi and Mamma were responsible absolving him Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 444. See also general references to the *amakhosikazi* as a unit unto itself in JSA, 1-5.

regarded as a woman, as her praises did not allude to her physical appearance.”<sup>99</sup>

However, during Mnkabayi’s life attractive physical appearance was not considered a solely feminine attribute. Praises of Shaka, Senzangakhona, and Dingane all describe their physical appearance, despite their being champions of masculinity and military strength.<sup>100</sup> In addition Shamase’s analysis presumes that power must necessarily be “unwomanly” and that in order to have power Mnkabayi needed to take on masculine characteristics. However, there were also spaces of agency which were off-limits to males in Zulu society.

The argument about whether or not Mnkabayi represents a feminist figure is an unproductive, and even presentist analysis. It relies on a false dichotomy between being a feminist and not being a feminist, and relies on a narrative lens to view Mnkabayi as a radical champion for women as a category. Within Mnkabayi’s context of experience women were stratified into social categories within the Zulu royal household, and it is unlikely that Mnkabayi sought to alter a system in which her social location offered privilege and mobility. Although it is tempting to label Mnkabayi as a feminist in order to understand how she was able to exert more influence than other *amakhosikazi*, she might be better represented as bargaining for social capital in a male-dominated system. Mnkabayi would take part in the hegemony of her brother Senzangakhona and his sons, not as a radical feminist, but as a woman in a privileged and precarious position taking part in, and even perpetuating, a patriarchal system in which she benefited due to her location and in which she had limited power.

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<sup>99</sup> Shamase, “Princess,” 13; Masuku, “The Depiction of Mnkabayi,” 14.

<sup>100</sup> Cope, *Izibongo*, 83-118.

### **Other *Amakhosikazi* in Senzangakhona's Household**

After Senzangakhona grew old enough to take direct control of the Zulu chiefship, his sisters Mnkabayi, Mawa, Mmama, and Sikile remained in the background as he married wives and built up a foundation of alliances for his rule. The twins Mnkabayi and Mmama and their younger sister Mawa each remained unmarried during their lifetimes, allowing them to remain independently powerful within Zulu society instead of transferring to that of a neighboring chiefdom where they might become subordinate to a husband, or at least out of the inner circle of access to Zulu royal power.

Senzangakhona, for his part, had nine or ten official wives of the royal house. These women largely came from other neighboring chiefdoms, cementing alliances, and building up the foundation for mutually beneficial co-existence.<sup>101</sup> Senznagakhona's *amakhosikazi* would remain important players in Zulu history long after Senzangakhona's death in 1816. He also had at least 24 sons, four of whom ruled after him to some degree and many of whom assassinated each other in pursuit of the chieftaincy. Senzangakhona's many *amakhosazana*, or daughters of the royal house, were also married to the rulers of other neighboring chiefdoms, further consolidating alliances and making connections between powerful families. For example Nozilwane, daughter of Senzangakhona's chief wife, was married into the neighboring amaLangeni in order to strengthen ties with this neighboring people.<sup>102</sup> The sons of Senzangakhona,

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<sup>101</sup> For a description of the physical structure of the household see Kuper, "The 'House,'" 480-84

<sup>102</sup> For a more complete discussion and the names of sons and daughters of Senzangakhona as well as a description of who they were married to see Eldredge, *Creation*, 184-5. For the original documentation see JSA, 1:23; JSA, 2:255.

with his *amakhosikazi* as their advisors and mentors, would chart the course of the Zulu chieftdom into the 1850s.<sup>103</sup>

Senzangakhona's senior wife was Mnkabi kaSodubo. Several other *amakhosikazi* who would have major roles later served as junior wives in her household, including Nandi, Bhibhi, and Langazana.<sup>104</sup> Nandi would bear and raise Shaka kaSenzangakhona, the most vilified, honored, and researched of the Zulu chiefs. Langazana was to later preside over the ceremonially important Siklebeni village and was known for having a significant number of followers.<sup>105</sup> Bhibhi was considered by many to be the "favorite" wife of Senzangakhona and watched over a village of her own.<sup>106</sup> Mpikase was another of Senzangakhona's *amakhosikazi*. She was the mother of Sigujana (or Mfokazi) who was named by some of James Stuart's informants as Senzangakhona's chosen heir to the chieftaincy. There is some dispute as to whether Bhibhi or Mpikase bore Dingane, who would later kill Shaka and take control, but evidence from successional disputes seems to favor Mpikase.<sup>107</sup> Songiya was the mother of Mpande, who would later rule after defeating Dingane.<sup>108</sup>

Senzangakhona's great wife Zitshungu, was the daughter of his former regent Mudhli. She was made Shaka's great wife and presided over eNngwegweni where she

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<sup>103</sup> In 1856 Cetshwayo kaMpande, the grandson of Senzangakhona, would effectively usurp his father and conduct joint rule until the latter's death in 1872.

<sup>104</sup> Maxwell Zakhele Shamase, "The Reign of King Mpande and his Relations with the Republic of Natalia and its Successor, the British Colony of Natal," PhD Thesis, University of Zululand, 1999, 3. See also JSA, 5:49.

<sup>105</sup> JSA, 1:20; JSA, 2:256.

<sup>106</sup> Dukuza was given as her place of residence JSA, 2:256.

<sup>107</sup> Wylie has indicated that Bhibhi was Dingane's mother; see Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 118, 124, 146. However, Eldredge puts forth a more compelling and well-researched argument with evidence from the succession dispute following Senzangakhona's death Eldredge, *Creation*, 184.

<sup>108</sup> JSA, 3:88-89.

lived until “when the Zulu war was fought.”<sup>109</sup> Although her father may not have been able to rule himself, Mudhli clearly had very obvious sway in the royal household, with a daughter holding the position of designated heir-bearer to the king, bringing status to both herself and to the rest of her family. Senzangakhona also married Ngcaka, Magulana and Bandile, although these women do not feature in the recorded oral histories beyond simple mentions.

As is clear in the paragraphs above, there was an incredible number of different women associated within the ruling family who would each have been engaged in the complex diplomacy of aligning themselves to further their own causes and access to power. Oral testimonies include reference to the different affiliations of these women, which could potentially be used to chart the alliances of various wives in Senzangakhona’s household. This work has been partially undertaken in Elizabeth Eldredge’s *The Creation of the Zulu Kingdom*, but may be expanded by exploring other sources of historical knowledge for example other early *izibongo*.<sup>110</sup>

### **Nandi: A Case Study in the *Isigodhlo***

The wife that is to be remembered most consistently was Nandi kaMbengi. Her son Shaka later expanded the Zulu Kingdom to the height of its range, and she provides a case study for women’s experience of succession. James Stuart asked his informants about Nandi more extensively than of any of the other *amakhosikazi* because of her position as the mother of Shaka. Nathaniel Isaacs and other settlers published and proliferated material, which popularized the concept of *mfecane* as a series of military

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<sup>109</sup>JSA, 2:208. The referenced “Zulu War” could refer to either 1940 when Dingane fought Mpande’s forces or 1856 when Cetshwayo fought his brother Mbuyazi for the coveted position as heir apparent.

<sup>110</sup> See Eldredge, *Creation*, 172-205.

conquests by Shaka that destabilized and depopulated the Lower Highveld.<sup>111</sup> This served as an alibi for expanding white settlements into “empty” territory. The *mfecane* theory of depopulation has since been convincingly disproven by Norman Etherington and other African historians, but remained a driving force behind many of James Stuart’s inquiries.<sup>112</sup>

Stuart was especially interested in the basis of Shaka’s legitimacy, and therefore in his status as bastard or legitimate child of Nandi. There are three informants whose versions of her relationship with Senzangakhona can be traced most closely back to the time period, Baleka, Jantshi and Ndlovu.<sup>113</sup> Carolyn Hamilton has investigated each of the informants, and despite differences in their testimony, analysis reveals a general storyline.<sup>114</sup> Born of marriage that allied the chiefdoms of amaLangeni and the abaQwabe, all of Stuart’s informants held that Nandi’s relationship with Senzangakhona started before they were officially married. The story is told in two versions. In the first the two meet before Senzangakhona is old enough to marry. As a herder, he came across Nandi whose family had strategically placed her there to seduce him. This version was popularized by a publication by Stuart. In the second version Nandi was a junior wife in Mnkabi’s household, who either Mnkabi placed in Senzangakhona’s bed, or who was rather unpopular for her vain attitude.<sup>115</sup> In all versions Shaka is presented as a questionably legitimate heir. It is not clear whether Senzangakhona was too young, if he had not yet paid the *ilobola* (bride price), or (as

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<sup>111</sup> See Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 9-36.

<sup>112</sup> See Carolyn Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>113</sup> JSA, 1:4-8; JSA, 1:198, 214, 222, 232; JSA, 4:198, 202, 214, 221, 232.

<sup>114</sup> For a more in depth analysis of these three informants and their backgrounds see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 62-67.

<sup>115</sup> For a full discussion of Shaka’s birth and the various informants see Eldredge, *Creation*, 42-59.



Henry Francis Fynn suggested in his travelogue) that Senzangakhona was uncircumcised and so any children were unfit to rule.<sup>116</sup> What is clear is that Nandi's pregnancy was scandalous and that she soon left to raise Shaka with her father's people the amaLangeni.

In all versions Royal Women are implicated in Nandi's departure and Shaka's birth. In one account Mnkabayi is said to have lied to Senzangakhona and warned Nandi to flee thereby protecting the heir and fulfilling as regent her duty to maintain the chieftaincy.<sup>117</sup> In one account of this story Mnkabayi demonstrates her power as regent to the king by having a man executed for telling Senzangakhona about the potential heir.<sup>118</sup> In a different version, it was Mntaniya who rescued the infant Shaka, and either sent him to be raised with his mother's family or was entrusted with him so Nandi could return to Senzangakhona.<sup>119</sup> Other versions paint Nandi as a proud woman who was rejected by the other women in the *isigodhlo*, (the royal enclosure for elite women, at an *ikhanda*) for her arrogance as a junior wife.<sup>120</sup> Although there are many stories and different versions of the tale each of them indicate the powerful royal women in the Zulu family actively participating in the struggle to control the royal lineage. Shaka, like Dingiswayo, left his father's household at a young age and grew up under the protection of his mother's people. However to become a fully realized in manhood he

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<sup>116</sup> Fynn suggests that Senzangakhona was uncircumcised at the time of Shaka's conception, which would indicated that he had not yet progressed into manhood, and was ineligible for marriage according to Zulu marriage practices. Eldredge, *Creation*, 185.

<sup>117</sup> JSA, 5:35; JSA, 2:47.

<sup>118</sup> JSA, 2:51

<sup>119</sup> JSA, 4:225.

<sup>120</sup> JSA, 5:59; JSA, 4:39.

would have to undergo various rites of male passage including joining an age-set of young men under Dingiswayo's tutelage.<sup>121</sup>

*Amakhosikazi* held important roles within the royal family before Shaka kaSenzangakhona and the expansion of the Zulu state to much larger territory. They set precedents for women's power through clan based power structures. They exerted influence through household and biological reproduction, access to spiritual power sources (milk and semen), and participated in conspiracy and rumor to manipulate male *inkhosi*. In 1816 there was a succession, and the dynamics would shift, although there were continuities in the patterns of how *amakhosikazi* experienced and accessed power.

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<sup>121</sup> He specifically grew up at the place of Mfunda, his maternal grandmother, according to one informant. JSA, 1:5.

## Part 2: Shaka's Relationships with Women (1816-1828)

### *Historical Overview*

Laband and other scholars have described Shaka's reign as a reorganization of the *amabutho* age-set system, which, in addition to extensive military campaigning, led to greater consolidation amongst disparate groups in the surrounding area. Under Shaka the Zulu Kingdom—kwaZulu—reached the greatest extent of its territorial influence. Unification for the amaZulu (the Zulu people) was part of a greater trend towards consolidation of larger tracts of land that was happening across the Eastern Coast of South Africa.

As has been briefly described above, before the nineteenth century, the kingdoms and chiefdoms on the eastern coastal area were decentralized and fluid, forming larger federations only periodically. Powerful families exercised social and ritual dominance control and collected tribute from their followers (sometimes a thousand or fewer). Historians now hold that Shaka reorganized the *amabutho* to ensure that he would have more consistent access to their labor, and also more intently asserted control over when and how younger *amabutho* members could be initiated into adulthood and begin their own *imizi*.<sup>122</sup> According to many of current scholars of Zulu history, these developments allowed him, and his male and female family members, to control the loosely federated clans in his territory and enriched his royal household while simultaneously expanding the kingdom.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Wright, "Turbulent Times," 238.

<sup>123</sup> See Eldredge, *Creation*, 106-39.

## Shaka's Rise to Power and the *Amakhanda*

While Shaka may have owed his early life to his female relatives, his relationships with women of his same age range were often negative. Some of Stuart's informants allude to Shaka as violent towards women of lesser social classes especially during his youth. SiSwati oral histories recorded him arbitrarily killing women and other young men.<sup>124</sup> However, as the evidence descends from part of a federation of groups who opposed Shaka, the evidence from these sources is suspect. Opposing ruling families or clan groups frequently slandered others through stories and rumor in a sort of propagandist tactic to gain followers. Even considering the potential for libel, historians have concluded that Shaka was a volatile character, and had a tendency towards violence that very likely extended to his treatment of women.<sup>125</sup> Although it would seem he respected the generational differences between himself and the *amakhosikazi*, with women in his age-range there may have been fewer social protocols that would restrict his behavior.

Shaka's chance to rule would arise before too long; his father, Senzangakhona, passed away in 1816. There is at least one oral tradition, which implicates Shaka in Senzangakhona's death through the use of magic as opposed to direct assassination, but the validity of this assertion is not clear.<sup>126</sup> After the Shaka father died, it was the two co-regents who had looked after the kingdom in Senzangakhona's youth, Mnkabayi and Mudhli, who took charge. As is clear in the story "Shaka and the Princess Mnkabayi," and other accounts which reference Shaka's take-over, he relied heavily on the approval

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<sup>124</sup> JSA, 1:149-50; See also Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 328.

<sup>125</sup> His volatile character may also have been part of his dramatic attempt to act the part of *inkhosi*. See Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 18-21.

<sup>126</sup> JSA, 4:122-24.

and assistance of Mnkabayi to take power.<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge states that it was Mudhli who made the key decisions for the Zulu royal household, and that Mnkabayi's role should not be exaggerated.<sup>128</sup> Regardless, it is impossible to ignore accounts that explicitly implicate Mnkabayi as "ruling" during certain periods.<sup>129</sup> Her *izibongo* are more widely recited and remembered than Mudhli's, and it is she who is credited with controlling the succession of at least two chiefs. Shaka would not be unusual in having two regents wherein the female was the more influential. This continued long afterward. In the early twentieth century, King Dinuzulu's mother would also be remembered as heavily influencing him, not her co-regent, Dinuzulu's uncle Ndabuko kaMpande.<sup>130</sup> Maxwell Shamase has gone so far as to suggest that Shaka's *izibongo* are similar to that of Mnkabayi due to her unusual amount of influence over him.<sup>131</sup> Considering the interfering noise of time passage and the complex set of factors surrounding Shaka as an myth or icon, it seems premature to preclude any serious influence that Mnkabayi may have had over the young chief, although the actions of a male co-regent would have overshadowed her role in military and political life. In almost all accounts, Mnkabayi was pivotal in Shaka's rise to power.

Shaka assumed chieftaincy after his father's death with the external military support of Dingiswayo, his mentor, and the internal approval and political positioning of several *amakhosikazi*. Eldredge's reading of this event does something to recognize

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<sup>127</sup> "Shaka and the Princess Mkhayabai," in *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa* ed. Constance B. Hilliard (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 432-46.

<sup>128</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 185-6.

<sup>129</sup> JSA, 2:51. See also Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific majesty: the powers of Shaka Zulu and the limits of historical invention*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998): 108; Jennifer Weir, "I Shall Use her to Rule," 5.

<sup>130</sup> Edward Muntu Masina, "Zulu Perceptions and Reactions to British Occupation of Land in Natal Colony and Zululand, 1850 -1887: A recapitulation Based on Surviving Oral and Written Sources," Ph.D Thesis, University of Zululand, 2006, 286.

<sup>131</sup> Shamase, "Princess Mnkabayi."

Mnkabayi, but doesn't sufficiently recognize to her ability to subtly manipulate male family members.<sup>132</sup> The oral accounts all agree that he killed Sigujana, the heir apparent, with the approval of Mnkabayi and two sisters (her twin Mmama, and Mawa), who then backed his claim to chieftaincy.<sup>133</sup> Mnkabayi, Mawa, and Mmama are noted in many histories as favoring Shaka because of the rank of his mother over Sigujana's mother.<sup>134</sup> Here, we may be seeing an example of the politics of the royal women becoming visible in succession disputes between family factions in the Zulu Royal house. In one version of the story Mnkabayi actively denied Sigujana the privilege of participating in Senzangakhona's funeral as the symbolic heir.<sup>135</sup> Other versions indicate that she tactically delayed the succession and sent for Shaka.<sup>136</sup> Even if Mudhli was a senior male, who might have ordinarily exerted control, Mnkabayi and her sisters were the ones responsible for the political maneuvering that placed Shaka in power. On his arrival Shaka killed Mudhli, and several of the other respected men in the kingdom.<sup>137</sup> His kingdom would rely on the older generation of royal women as well as his half-brothers instead of the older generation of men.

Shaka and his followers built up *amakhanda*, the large regimental homesteads, across their territory. These served to protect borders, project control, and house his *amabutho*. Under Shaka *amakhanda* were largely overseen by *amakhosikazi*. Eldredge has suggested that Shaka "made use" of his female relations as the administrators of the *amakhanda*, but while it may have benefitted Shaka, it certainly allowed these women a

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<sup>132</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 186-187.

<sup>133</sup> JSA, 5:53.

<sup>134</sup> JSA, 1:199,182; JSA, 3:84; JSA, 4:84, 205.

<sup>135</sup> JSA, 1:199.

<sup>136</sup> JSA, 1:199.

<sup>137</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 187.

significant amount of sway over the day-to-day organization of huge numbers of people as well.

Shaka's three aunts, who had supported his take-over, were each rewarded with a place of residence at regional *amakhanda* and built up followings of their own.

Mnkabayi was in charge of her village Baqulusi, home to the ebaQulusini who later pledged their allegiance to the royal household.<sup>138</sup> Mmama lived in Esisebenii, "on the riverbank."<sup>139</sup> Mawa reined over king Shaka's eNtonteleni *ikhanda*.<sup>140</sup> Shaka also showed respect for, and connection to, his maternal relatives who were placed in his primary *ikhanda*, and he displayed dramatic public remorse after the passing of his paternal grandmother Mntaniya, which Fynn recorded in his diary in 1824.<sup>141</sup> Fynn's account of Mntaniya's funeral ceremony involved mourning on a huge scale, bring the surrounding peoples together in reverence of a significant female figure, and consolidating both Zulu supremacy and unity.<sup>142</sup> Stuart's informant Jantshi also indicates that Shaka built an *umuzi* for his sister Nomcoba, showing reverence and respect to his *inkhosazana*.<sup>143</sup> Because the *amabutho* were raised on a regional basis, it is possible that as the heads of various regional households, the *amakhosikazi* may have been able to direct and raise followings of their own in a fairly independent manner. However, as Eldredge points out, while they may have presided over the *amakhanda* in an administrative capacity, they were still under the authority of Shaka and his brothers.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Shamase, "Princess Mnkabayi," 2. See also JSA, 2:91.

<sup>139</sup> JSA, 2:91. For a more complete description of the homesteads see Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 236-7.

<sup>140</sup> JSA, 2:216. Shamase, "Princess Mnkabayi," 2; JSA, 3:109

<sup>141</sup> Fynn, *Diary*, 121.

<sup>142</sup> Fynn, *Diary*, 121; 131-133; JSA, 1:307, 337; JSA, 4:292-3.

<sup>143</sup> JSA, 1:191.

<sup>144</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 188.

### **Other Women of the *Isigodhlo*:**

Shaka had an estimated 150-200 women in his *isigodhlo*. Eldredge argues that these women, specifically those from other powerful households served to deter any would-be opposition to Shaka's rule, as they remained under the rule of his favor and wrath and were sometimes put to death.<sup>145</sup> When these women became pregnant, as Shaka is thought to have taken no precautions against pregnancy, the oral histories are in agreement that the women had to either abort the child or be put to death.<sup>146</sup> John Ross/Chales Maclean was a young boy when he lived with Shaka and the amaZulu. As such he was permitted to live in full access to the *isigodhlo*. He believed that women disappeared into obscurity if they became pregnant by Shaka, but did not note that any were killed.<sup>147</sup> Bryant, Stuart and other early Zulu historians tended to discuss the *isigodhlo* as sorts of exclusive brothels, but as Hanretta points out they were "much more than harems of the [chief or] king; they were focal points and sources of regal patronage."<sup>148</sup>

Shaka may have taken an abnormal amount of liberties with the women in his *isigodhlo*, because of his high status as *inkhosi* of the dominant ruling family. Ordinarily the relatives of a girl who was sent to a different household for marriage would be able to offer limited protection by pressuring her husband to treat her well. However, there is evidence suggesting that in the *isigodhlo* of the increasingly powerful abakwaZulu, Shaka was able to take liberties with many of his *umndlunkulu* (royal handmaidens) in ways that ordinary Zulu men, and even other *inkhosi*, might not have

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<sup>145</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 188.

<sup>146</sup> For a more explicit discussion see Eldredge, *Creation*, 188.

<sup>147</sup> Stephen Gray, *Natal Papers of "John Ross,"* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>148</sup> Ndlovu, "A Reassessment of Women's Power," 113.



been able to. In one instance Shaka ordered a girl's own father to put her to death after she displeased him.<sup>149</sup> This story may be an exaggeration of Shaka's ability to act with impunity. However, it also demonstrates the powerlessness of the male relatives to protect their daughters and sisters in the royal *isigodhlo*, and the control that male kings wielded over ordinary women who did not hold the prestigious position of *amakhosikazi*.

Even in positions of extreme vulnerability within Shaka's *isigodhlo*, some traditions still exist which indicate resistance and refusal as ways in which women may have asserted themselves. For example, one girl chose to be put to death rather than sleep with Shaka because she believed he was ugly.<sup>150</sup> Although the balance of power in the story clearly stands in Shaka's favor, this woman was still capable of making a choice and asserting her independence even if in a very limited fashion. Shaka may have been able to take greater liberties with the women who entered his *isigodhlo*, but historians should not disregard the women inside as docile or homogenous accessories to his rule.

Almost all sources agree that Shaka never married—potentially an unusual change in protocol for a ruling household. Both Eldredge and Wylie point out that an informant, Gxubu, told Stuart with certainty that a woman named Mzetepi was Shaka's wife, but none of the other sources reference her. Most sources adamantly claim that Shaka avoided marriage. Some informants did reference a rumored that he had one wife before he was appointed as *inkhosi*, but in these versions the woman's family never received

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<sup>149</sup> JSA, 3:228.

<sup>150</sup> JSA, 1:11.

*ilobola*, thus any children would remain illegitimate.<sup>151</sup> Jennifer Weir argues Shaka engaged in ritual celibacy in order to “focus power on himself” and “address potential threats” or heirs who may contend for power and decentralize the state.<sup>152</sup> Shaka took no wives in order to concentrate his own power and preclude the possibility of competition with his sons for supremacy. Maclean specifically suggests that it was Shaka’s intention to pass the throne to his half-brother Dingane and thus he could not have any potential rivals.

Paul Bjerk, a historian focusing on oral traditions and mythology, has argued the point was more metaphoric. He holds that Shaka ensured “there would be no seepage of power away from the king in the form of children bearing his semen in their bones.”<sup>153</sup> One of Stuart’s informants calls Shaka the “milk bucket that overflows without giving birth” in a way which may be either a positive abundance of potency, or a negative connotation of over concentration of power.<sup>154</sup> What is clear is that milk, cattle and women were seen as conduits of power and authority, and circulation amongst different families was key to distribution and balance of power and control. Bjerk’s analysis ignores clear evidence that Shaka did, in fact, engage sexually with many women, and while a desire to negate any potential heirs to the throne is clear, it is not clear that he did so out of desire to keep his sexual fluids to himself.<sup>155</sup> However, he clearly approached relations with women differently depending on their status as either the privileged elderly *amakhosikazi*, or the vulnerable *umndlunkulu*.

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<sup>151</sup> JSA, 5:41, 90

<sup>152</sup> Weir, “I Shall Need to Use Her to Rule,” 19.

<sup>153</sup> Bjerk, “They Poured Themselves,” 12.

<sup>154</sup> JSA, 5:84.

<sup>155</sup> Bjerk, “They Poured Themselves,” 12.

### **Nandi's Death: Possibilities for Violence Against *Amakhosikazi***

Shaka would eventually turn on his *amakhosikazi* as well. In a dramatic end, most of the oral traditions hold that Shaka killed his mother Nandi, in 1827.<sup>156</sup> Most informants suggest that the reason was that she was harboring a potential heir to the throne, just as Shaka had been hidden from his own father. One account holds that Shaka discovered Nandi nursing a small child and demanded, "Where does it come from?" To which Nandi cheekily responded, "Don't you have a penis then?"<sup>157</sup> Considering Stuart's source did not witness the event first hand, it seems unlikely that, 70 years on, he would have been able to recount the actual conversation verbatim.<sup>158</sup> All the same the story is repeated in numerous other accounts, and even Henry Fynn's travelogue includes reference. He believed that Nandi had died of dysentery, but her wounds may have been consistent with the possibility that she was stabbed.<sup>159</sup> There is also the possibility that Shaka's rivals or enemies concocted this story later to stain Shaka's reputation, his credibility, or indeed the legitimacy of the abakwaZulu as a whole. Despite the possibility of falsehood, the story is pervasive in sources from many different backgrounds and it seems possible that Shaka committed matricide.

John Wright, co-writer of the JSA, has suggested that the despotic actions and arbitrary violence displayed by Shaka may have been, "as much a sign of the insecure

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<sup>156</sup> Stuart's informant was born in 1822, and thus was 5 when the mourning occurred. JSA, 3:31.

<sup>157</sup> JSA, 5:35.

<sup>158</sup> Although Eldredge suggests that this might indicate the story originated from someone close within the isigodhlo, there are other examples in the oral histories wherein dialogue is inserted as a literary tool to add effect. This is a possible scenario, but should be viewed with some caution. Eldredge, *Creation*, 192.

<sup>159</sup> This possibility is raised by Elizabeth Eldredge, and seems that it could be a reasonable explanation for why the oral traditions are not in agreement with his writings on the point of Nandi's death. Eldredge, *Creation*, 192.

bases of his rule as of the power that he wielded.”<sup>160</sup> In the case of Nandi’s death, this reading might suggest that Shaka killed his mother because he felt as though his dominance over the *amakhosikazi* was weak. His rash matricide might indicate fear and weakness; not a sign self-assurance in his masculine authority. If true, this reading, or gendered analysis of masculinity, would indicate a level of potency and influence by the *amakhosikazi* over their grown sons that historians have not fully explored.

After his mother’s death, Shaka put the whole nation into mourning. Eldredge has suggested that Shaka imposed an extended mourning period out of remorse for murdering his mother.<sup>161</sup> Fynn’s account of Nandi’s funeral involved mass mobilization, lavish demonstrations of grief, and violence.<sup>162</sup> Her death was used as an excuse to arbitrarily murder those who did not mourn sufficiently.<sup>163</sup> Some *umndlunkulu* were buried with Nandi “to cook for her down there,” a practice that was new to Fynn, but which has precedents in other sources.<sup>164</sup> According to Fynn for a year no milk was to be consumed, no planting was to be done, and all husbands were ordered to kill their wives if they were found to be pregnant.<sup>165</sup> This account is consistent with some of Stuart’s informants who recall the time as a period of famine, which may have been due to a period of enforced mourning.<sup>166</sup>

It is unlikely that Shaka was able to fully enforce these commandments as his rule was based on tributes and conquest but was not absolute. Nonetheless, Shaka was

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<sup>160</sup> Wright, *Cambridge History of South Africa* vol. 1, 229.

<sup>161</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 192-97.

<sup>162</sup> Fynn, *Diary*, 131-33.

<sup>163</sup> There is potential that rivals used this mourning period as an excuse to kill enemies, a possibility raised by Jantshi in the JSA. Fynn, *Diary*, 135. JSA, 1:195.

<sup>164</sup> Henry Francis Fynn says the women were buried alive, but wasn’t actually at the funeral. JSA, 4:292-293. Fynn, *Diary*, 135-37.

<sup>165</sup> Fynn, *Diary*, 135-37.

<sup>166</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 192.

probably able to impose some of his restrictions over the people in his immediate locale, which Eldredge interprets as a sign of remorse, and Weir has suggested comes from a desire to consolidate his rule. Shaka ended the period of mourning with a military campaign, the *ihlambo* or “washing of the spears.” Jennifer Weir concludes that the funeral and this resulting campaign were “more extravagant than those [following the death of] of male chiefs” and relates it to a “purification ceremony” that consisted of a cattle raid instead of the traditional hunt.<sup>167</sup> It is certainly a possibility that Shaka intended this demonstration to signify his remorse or the consolidation of his rule. However, there is also the possibility that it served to demonstrate his authority over his family members while simultaneously attempting a gesture of respect towards the importance of *amakhosikazi*. In enforcing extended mourning he was reaffirming Nandi’s significance, but Shaka may also have been asserting his dominance by both changing the ceremony and killing those he felt offered insufficient signs of remorse.

Nandi’s death also demonstrates that even the most powerful *amakhosikazi* were vulnerable to violence from male family members, or powerful *amakhosi* in general. Dingane, Mpande and later Cetshwayo would each be responsible for the deaths of various *amakhosikazi*. Multiple royal women met their ends through assassination by Zulu kings or princes pursuing political power. However the politics of the royal household was risky for men too. Shaka and Dingane assassinated the majority of their half-brothers during political purges at the start of their respective reigns. In contrast, many of Senzangakhona’s wives lived to be elderly. In the late 1700s up through 1828, women held status as bridges between ruling families, and manipulators of rumors and secrecy in politics of ruling relations within households and between them.

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<sup>167</sup> Italics are mine. Weir, “Chiefly Women,” 14; JSA, 5:35.

*Umndlunkulu* in the Zulu *isigodhlo* could be vulnerable to arbitrary violence, but women were also able to access power through sexual relations. *Amakhosikazi* held generational status as matriarchal figures and were capable of influencing *amakhosi* to act in particular ways, but were also capable of shoring up power of their own.

### Part 3: Shaka's Assassination to Mawa's Crossing (1829-1843)

#### *Historical Overview:*

The period of time between 1829 and 1843 would see changes in the Thukela River Valley far beyond those that occurred within the walls of Zulu *amakhanda*. British and Boer settlers expanded into the region, destabilizing certain chiefdoms and ruling families, but also offering opportunities for expansion and trade. During the 1820s the British imperialists in the Cape went to war over their borders with the amaXhosa to the east, welcomed British settlers, and instituted legislature on language and emancipation that alienated their Dutch-descended residents.<sup>168</sup> These settlers living on the edges of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope are more frequently referred to as the Boers.

In defiance of the British colonial government, some of these Boers left the Colony in small groups, and became what historians now call "Voertrekkers." The Boer trekkers, left British-controlled Cape colony and searched for independence, trade, and farmland, while avoiding the British colonial restrictions.<sup>169</sup> In their treks the Boers maintained ties to colonial trade and carried the nexus of colonization into the interior as ten percent of the white population of the Cape left for the interior.<sup>170</sup> Simultaneously, settlers of British descent trading from Port Natal continued to agitate for increased protection (but fewer restrictions) from the growing imperial army.

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<sup>168</sup> The first and second wars against the Xhosa started in the 1810s, and continued into the 1820s culminating with Sir Benjamin D'Urban and Colonel Harry Smith expanding the Cape Colony East towards the River Kei. See Wright, "Turbulent Times," 237.

<sup>169</sup> Martin Legassick and Robert Ross, "From Slave Economy to Settler Capitalism," in *The Cambridge University History of Southern Africa* vol. 1, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288.

<sup>170</sup> For a germinal piece on the expansion of the Boers into the Eastern Cape, which furthers discussion on the rise of kwaZulu see Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks*.

The Zulu royal family had been in contact with these external white groups since the arrival of traders to Port Natal. In 1827 Shaka had received a notice from the Cape Colony not to expand any further to the South after his cattle raiding provoked concern.<sup>171</sup> Only a few months later, two of Shaka's half brothers deposed him in September of 1828. Dingane, one of the assassins, took power and established his own supporters in positions of power within kwaZulu. He was aware of the transformations of the British Colony in the Eastern Cape, but more pressingly concerned with the White Traders in the Port of Natal.<sup>172</sup> A rough group of 53 people by 1837, Dingane had already banished the Port Natal Traders once in 1831 for insubordination.<sup>173</sup> Despite Captain Allen Gardiner, the first Christian Missionary to kwaZulu in 1835, trying desperately to monitor the gun-trade and instill moral order on behalf of both the Cape Colony, and the Zulu *amakhosi*, these traders continued to play a double game, working both as mercenaries for the Zulu and to encourage the arrival of more white settlers to the Port.<sup>174</sup> As tensions mounted the British Colonial government expressed

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<sup>171</sup> Shaka specifically raided South beyond the Mathatha river alarming the British forces that had only recently expanded into Xhosa Territory. Wright, "Turbulent Times," 237; Laband, *Dictionary of Zulu Wars*, xv.

<sup>172</sup> The traders had been welcomed by Shaka, and generally enjoyed positive relations, acting (for all intents and purposes) as tributary *inkhosi* under the Zulu chief. However, Trader involvement with Zulu political affairs, for example, encouraging Southward expansion, concerned some Zulu elite. These elite may have thought the traders were overstepping the bounds as tributaries to Shaka with their forward suggestions, and uncertain loyalty. So in 1831 Dingane banished the traders from the Port of Natal. Wright, "Turbulent Times," 236-38.

<sup>173</sup> Wright, "Turbulent Times," 239.

<sup>174</sup> Laband, *Dictionary of Zulu Wars*, xxvi.



concern about gun trade, and Boer settlements which they feared would destabilize the area, and perhaps even reach as far as the Cape Colony itself.<sup>175</sup>

Trekker groups reached the lower Thukela River Valley in 1837 and requested a land grant from Dingane.<sup>176</sup> While originally meeting on diplomatic terms and carrying out tasks for the king, relations between the Zulu *inkhosi* and Trekkers quickly turned sour on February 2, 1838 when Dingane ordered the execution of Boer leader Piet Retief and Retief's men at his principal *ikhanda* Mugungundlovu.<sup>177</sup> Zulu *amabutho* quickly attempted to drive the Boers away with considerable initial success—capturing thousands of cattle, and decisively sacking the Port of Natal.<sup>178</sup> Unfortunately the success would not last, and in December the newly elected Boer leader Andries Pretorius led his assorted force of Boers, English Adventurers and African Forces in search of a decisive victory against Dingane at the Ncome River.<sup>179</sup> The resulting Battle of the Ncome River (Blood River) and subsequent losses led Dingane to broker a peace deal with the Boers.

Only seven weeks later Mpande, Dingane's last surviving half-brother, threw off his allegiance and opened communication with the Boer trekkers. The Trekkers laid claim to a large area South of kwaZulu based on a questionable contract that they

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<sup>175</sup> Captain Gardiner states this concern almost explicitly in the following excerpt of a letter to Colonel Bell "At the present moment it is comparatively easy to stay the evil [trade in guns], but if deferred no enactment will meet the exigency, and in the course of a very few years - perhaps not many months - the Zulu army, led by a second Chaka, may, with muskets in their hands, not only sweep all before them in Natal, but, encouraged by such partial success, even dispute the very boundaries of our colonial territory. Their progress may, indeed, be less rapid, but the result will not be the less certain." Captain Gardiner to Colonel Bell, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1837, in John Bird (ed.), *Annals of Natal: 1495-1845*, vol. I, (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), 314.

<sup>176</sup> Dingane met with Piet Retief on October 19, 1837 in what Etherington calls a "calculated display of Zulu power" including displays of thousands of men from his *amabutho* and thousands of cattle. Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 263.

<sup>177</sup> Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 265.

<sup>178</sup> Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 266-67.

<sup>179</sup> Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 279.

claimed Dingane had signed in his meeting with Piet Retief.<sup>180</sup> The joint forces of Mpande and his Boer allies soon pushed Dingane to the North where he was eventually defeated, and his followers dispersed or were absorbed into other groups. In 1840 Mpande, now *inkhosi* of the Zulu people, was bound to the South by the Thukela River he would have to contend from the early 1840s onward with Boer republics and British colonies in the regions surrounding his kingdom.<sup>181</sup> All throughout the reign of both Dingane and Mpande, *amakhosikazi* would continue to serve as advisors, legitimizers and ritual authorities within the Zulu royal family, however as the events detailed here indicate, new and powerful elements were emerging. External forces could and did drastically change the balance of power between members of the ruling Zulu family, but this provides only partial insight into dynamics for the abakwaZulu. More in-depth analysis is necessary to pick apart the ways that Zulu women in general, and the *amakhosikazi* in particular, experienced the 1830s and early 1840s.

### **Dingane's Rise and Uses of the *Isigodhlo***

Shaka may have murdered his mother, but this violence did not intimidate other *amakhosikazi* into submission. Following Nandi's death, several royal women, led by Mnkabayi, worked with Shaka's younger half-brother Dingane to remove the increasingly erratic ruler.<sup>182</sup> Shaka was reported to be in a state of high anxiety after the

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<sup>180</sup> Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 281.

<sup>181</sup> Specifically the short-lived Republic of Natalia (1840-43) was started and held by the Boer trekkers as an independent entity, and then annexed by the British Imperial powers in 1843. Subsequently many Boer trekkers left to join other Republics on the upper Highveld. Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 285-93.

<sup>182</sup> Shaka had begun to lead cattle raids, which stretched increasingly far-afield. As a result, his tired following seems to have grown increasingly despondent and restless. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 44-5. While somewhat imaginative, the basic premise for Shaka's murder is consistent with accounts found in the JSA; see Laband, *Rise and Fall*, xiii.

death of his mother in 1827.<sup>183</sup> In an effort to gain cattle to redistribute amongst tributaries and reduce some of the tensions between rivals within his own family group, Shaka sent his *amabutho* on several failed missions. His forces first headed South to affect a raid on the amaMpondo, and then, potentially due to concern about a growing conspiracy to kill him, he sent his forces out again to the far-north against Soshangane and the Gasa kingdom.<sup>184</sup> Unfortunately this strategy had a price, and Shaka lost favor amongst his *amabutho* as he ordered them through lengthy unsuccessful missions. Mnkabayi and her sisters encouraged Shaka's younger brothers to take advantage of this vulnerability. In 1828, one year after his mother's death, Dingane and another half-brother Mhlangana deserted Shaka's *amabutho* and returned to assassinate the unsuspecting king. In the resulting crisis of succession the *amakhosikazi* supported Dingane in taking on the role of Zulu royal *inkhosi*.<sup>185</sup>

Now in a position of power, Dingane set about consolidating his base with the support of these powerful women. Shaka's *amabutho* would soon return from their failed mission in the north, and Dingane had an opportunity to set a precedent for how he would effectively institute his own power, and how he would lead as *inkhosi*. One of the oral histories portrays a conversation dealing specifically with how Dingane would approach the royal *isigodhlo*. Dingane converses with his advisor Nzobo about the merits of keeping an *isigodhlo*. Initially Dingane says, "I do not want an *isigodlo* [sic].

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<sup>183</sup> This is discussed by some early sources as an indication of Shaka's extreme grief, however other more reliable sources indicate that it may have been paranoia, coupled with concern about recently failed cattle-raiding expeditions. See Eldredge, *Creation*, 253-60; Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 87.

<sup>184</sup> Some evidence suggests that traders in the Port of Natal played a hand in first encouraging Shaka's advance South, in order to sour relations with the Cape, and also potentially encouraging conspirators within Shaka's ranks. Wright, "Turbulent Times," 235-38; Eldredge, *Creation*, 276-90.

<sup>185</sup> Hamilton provides a sound argument for Mnkabayi and Mamma's involvement with Shaka's death and absolution of his assassins Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 108.

That is what is destroying the people.”<sup>186</sup> His advisor retorts, “You can’t be called a king if you have no *isigodlo* [sic]. How, without one, can you be king?”<sup>187</sup> Although it is highly likely that this specific conversation was invented into the oral traditions, it also indicates something pivotal about the role of the *isigodhlo* as a power source for the Zulu chiefs in general, and perhaps something about Dingane’s approach in particular. Dingane’s advisor implies having an *isigodhlo* is essential to kingship. This may in turn suggest that the tribute and presence of *umndlunkulu*, in addition to the daily administrative activities of *amakhosikazi* and *amakhosazana* within the *isigodhlo*, were indispensable to the kingdom. In this oral evidence the advisor recognized Women’s contributions as crucial, potentially suggesting the way that the *isigodhlo* had to be negotiated by both men and women as a place of access to power.

However, Dingane’s advisor, Nzobo, may have only recognized women and the *isigodhlo* as an important tool for political cleansing. In the immediate wake of his take-over, Dingane enlisted his *isigodhlo* to purge his governing body of potential rivals. One of Stuart’s informants recalls a story wherein the informant’s father, and other high-ranking men were invited by Dingane to dispose of the *umndlunkulu* (royal handmaidens) as they pleased.<sup>188</sup> This may have been part of Dingane’s initial projection of himself as a jolly sovereign in the first few weeks of his reign, when pleasing and gaining the support of tributary families was imperative. He offered a chance for *inkhosi*, and other leaders of the returning *amabutho*, to enter the forbidden *isigodhlo*. These men made a grave mistake by breaking sacred protocol and trespassing

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<sup>186</sup> JSA, 1:196.

<sup>187</sup> JSA, 1:196.

<sup>188</sup> JSA, 1:197.

into restricted territory.<sup>189</sup> Dingane turned on them the next morning and executed many, including some of his half-brothers who might have otherwise contended for the throne.<sup>190</sup> He relied on the reports of the *umndlunkulu* women and girls themselves to point out transgressors, both male and female for execution.<sup>191</sup>

The *inkhosi* may have been using this opportunity to demonstrate his omnipotence. Like Shaka, Dingane sometimes committed arbitrary acts of violence as assertions of authority, and in purging his royal brothers and military leaders of potential rivals would have presented a strong message.<sup>192</sup> Dingane, after all, had only just pulled off a successful coup. However, the incident can also be read from the original history through a lens focused on the actual experience of women in the *isigodhlo*. Although some *isigodhlo* women were executed, Dingane also relied on them to point out his targets.<sup>193</sup> This would have offered a chance for *amakhosikazi* whom Dingane favored to purge their own ranks in preparation for a new rule as well.

### ***Inkhosikazi* Milk and Nature of *Amakhosikazi* Power**

During his reign, Dingane relied even more heavily on Senzangakhona's wives and sisters for administrative capacity than his brother Shaka. Perhaps this was due to his distrust for other male members of the royal household who might turn on him as easily as he had turned on Shaka.<sup>194</sup> Dingane was also suspicious of the Port Natal

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<sup>189</sup> The *isigodhlo* was reserved for the royal family (*inkhosi*, *amakhosikazi*, *amakhosazana* and the heirs to the *inkhosi*), tributary *umndlunkulu*, and other non-specified servants to the abakwaZulu. See Adam Kuper, "The House," 469-87.

<sup>190</sup> JSA, 1:197.

<sup>191</sup> JSA, 1:197.

<sup>192</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 52.

<sup>193</sup> JSA, 1:197.

<sup>194</sup> Dingane turned on both Shaka and his co-conspirator Mhlangana. His advisor Nzobo was also thought to have played both parties against each other during the coup suggesting that he may have been untrustworthy. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 46-50.

traders, and it may be that in relying on the *amakhosikazi* Dingane felt more secure from infringements by other male leaders. Mnkabayi's role especially expanded under Dingane. She and her sisters were able to operate more autonomously, and Mnkabayi herself presided over ceremonies giving praises to ancestors before the army went out to war.<sup>195</sup> It is unlikely that these women possessed the "monopoly" on power that Carolyn Hamilton has afforded *amakhosikazi*, though they were certainly authorities.<sup>196</sup> They frequently consulted Dingane, and even Mnkabayi, in all her ritual prestige, was second to the king.<sup>197</sup> They should not be granted influence beyond their subordinate positions, and suggesting a monopoly would imply that *amakhosikazi* might potentially disobey Dingane's orders.<sup>198</sup> I have found no evidence to support *amakhosikazi* ever outwardly opposing Dingane. On the other extreme Elizabeth Eldredge maintains that *amakhosikazi* held little "significant independent power" because their positions did not provide for such authority.<sup>199</sup> This reading seems to undervalue the significance of informal ways in which the *amakhosikazi* as individuals and a collective could operate in the *isigodhlo* to negotiate power within different powerful families, and the fact that Dingane had seen fit to place many of his fathers wives in his regional *amakhanda* thereby maintaining the local presence of the Zulu royal family.

Under Dingane, Hamilton has asserted that the number of women in the *izigodhlo* declined.<sup>200</sup> Hamilton's argument attributes the reduction of the *isigodhlo* to

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<sup>195</sup> JSA, 5:80-84.

<sup>196</sup> In Hamilton's reading she points to the agricultural production of women in the *amakhanda* as cause for a "monopoly" on power. While I would suggest that their role in production served as a basis for women's value, it does not discount the existing social hierarchies. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 444

<sup>197</sup> JSA, 5:370-371.

<sup>198</sup> Wylie overstates their independence in regards to making decisions without the chief's approval. Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 236, 336.

<sup>199</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 200.

<sup>200</sup> Hamilton, "Oral tradition," 427.

state instability. She posits that Dingane reduced the size of his *isigodhlo* to gain cattle by marrying his *umndlunkulu* to other chiefs and receiving their *ilobola* or bride price of cattle.<sup>201</sup> Hanretta, however, has more convincingly suggested that Dingane was unable to collect tribute from his subsidiary chiefs due to his strained relationship with the traditional lineage authorities, and because of his shorter cattle raiding campaigns, which reaped fewer rewards for his followers.<sup>202</sup> Like the majority of the rulers in this region, Dingane's reign relied on cattle in order to function. As a form of living wealth, cattle represented the livelihoods and value of a household in the Zulu kingdom and for men trying to establish *imizi* and gain prestige their attainment was vital.

Cattle were also pivotal to the lives of Zulu women. In a recent article, Paul Bjerk has expanded on a more theoretical relationship between women and milk. His writing is suggestive of the hierarchical position of *amakhosikazi* in the Zulu Kingdom. Bjerk argues, "women were understood as analogous to cattle—not as beasts of burden but as stores of the essential creative power of life."<sup>203</sup> He continues to argue that milk in the Zulu state acted as a literal bearer of royal power, not just the symbolical essence of power in the Zulu kingdom.<sup>204</sup> Although Eldredge has disputed his claims about the literal importance of milk in political organization, it does serve as an interesting lens to examine pathways of power in the Zulu kingdom.<sup>205</sup>

One of Stuart's informants describes the path from udder to the royal family. Young boys and older male servants to the royal family collected milk from the royal

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<sup>201</sup> For a more in-depth exploration of *ilobola* and the importance of cattle see Adam Kuper, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa* (Boston MA, 1982). Hamilton, "Oral tradition," 427.

<sup>202</sup> Sean Hanretta, "Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Journal of African History* 39, no. 3 (1998): 405.

<sup>203</sup> Bjerk, "They Poured themselves," 11.

<sup>204</sup> Bjerk, "They Poured Themselves," 6.

<sup>205</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 358.

cattle. The women of the *isigodhlo* then poured the milk into pots in the *isigodhlo* and later transferred into the gourds for distribution “by the mothers of the king's wives.”<sup>206</sup> The hierarchy in this exchange starts with the servant class in the *amakhanda* (male and female) at the bottom tier. From there, the women of the *isigodhlo* are entrusted with the power and prestige of preparing the milk and, in fact, all of the *inkhosi*'s foodstuffs. From there the milk would pass to the *amakhosikazi* who would ultimately determine where and how it was used. Although they did not herd the cattle themselves, they were keepers of the powerful life-giving substance that gave cattle much of their worth. In this interpretation, *Amakhosikazi* acted as guardians of the nation's life-blood, and although they were ultimately subordinate to Dingane, they were afforded tremendous prestige for this role.

### **Invaders: Arrival of the Voortrekkers and Fall of Dingane**

As has been alluded to above, the arrival of Voortrekkers to kwaZulu in 1838 would present the kingdom with a new challenge in the shape of the invasive presence of small groups of Boers in conjunction with increasing interest in the Southern Highveld by British colonial officials. The Boers and some of their allies in Port Natal posed serious challenges to Dingane's rule in the late 1830s. After Dingane killed Piet Reief and other Boer leaders in 1837, many Trekkers felt bitterly about the *inkhosi*, and would have been happy to see him overturned. But, while their battles crucially weakened Dingane, it was eventually a challenger from within the abakwaZulu who would depose the *inkhosi*, and to some extent the *amakhosikazi* who had administered his *amakhanda*.

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<sup>206</sup> JSA, 5:214. See also Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 200.



Mpande, the last remaining half-brother to Dingane and another of Senzangakhona's sons, eventually overthrew his brother and installed a new generation of *amakhosi* and *amakhosikazi* to power. In 1838, Mpande defected from his brother's court, after he received rumors suggesting that Dingane might be plotting to kill him. Mpande and his following escaped across the Thukela to the Southern costal regions close to the Port of Natal, where he had allies. There, he negotiated for military support from the Boers who were bitter towards Dingane and eager to gain cattle as the spoils of war. Together the two forces mounted a joint campaign against Dingane brother in exchange for vast territorial concessions. Dingane's brother Mpande and his Boer supporters dispersed Dingane's military, captured his capital, and finally broke apart his *isigodhlo*. Eventually Dingane was killed in 1840.

Mpande's succession involved external support from white military parties in a way that none of his predecessors had. He did depended on his neighbors and more traditional clan-based support systems, for the majority of his military victories and diplomatic positioning. But he also had to contend with Boer and Natal based populations, who were not bound by some of the same socio-cultural similarities shared by other Nguni-speaking peoples. However, he did not come to power under the auspices of the Mnkabayi and other *amakhosikazi* of her generation the way Dingane had. There is no direct evidence from the JSA about what his relationship with Mnkabayi may have been, however there are some places where Mpande's relationship to the preceeding generation of *amakhosikazi* might be drawn out.

While purging his brother's administration, Mpande killed, exiled or removed some of the powerful women who had supported his brother's government, but also

maintained some of them as powerful religious figures and advisors. For example on January 29<sup>th</sup> in 1840, as Mpande's forces sacked his brother's capital city, they discovered the *inkhosikazi* Bhibhi hiding in a streambed to escape the avenging soldiers.<sup>207</sup> Initially, Mpande hesitated to allow his advisors to kill his father's favorite wife, and potentially intended to "set her in a high position."<sup>208</sup> Mpande apprehensively stated, "Let her not be killed. I shall need to use her to rule."<sup>209</sup> However, his supporters stabbed her all the same for the favoritism she had received under the three preceding rulers.<sup>210</sup> Mpande seems to have accepted this murder, although his response is difficult to read as either tacit permission or powerlessness to stop his soldiers. In the following years, as Mpande set his own supporters in positions of power, many specific *amakhosikazi* who had been part of Dingane's governing cohort were killed or removed from central positions.<sup>211</sup>

One such woman was Mnkabayi, the great kingmaker. Mnkabayi passed away in 1840 during the beginning of Mpande's reign. A fascinating example of the extent and limitations of *amakhosikazi* influence, she was implicated in the rise of three ruling kings, an administrator and religious leader in her own right, and unmarried until her passing. Maxwell Shamase contends that "she died a lonely woman in 1843 during the reign of Mpande," but her death is most commonly presented as 1840, however the

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<sup>207</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 117.

<sup>208</sup> JSA, 2:206.

<sup>209</sup> JSA, 2:206. See also Weir, "I shall Need to Use Her to Rule," 3-5.

<sup>210</sup> JSA, 2:206.

<sup>211</sup> Nozilwane (half-sister of Dingane), for example, was searched out and killed by Mpande after Dingane was defeated for her particularly close relationship with the late chief. JSA, 1:23.

published oral histories are remarkably silent as to the actual cause.<sup>212</sup> This would suggest that regardless of the exact date, she fell out of the eye of the new administrators of kwaZulu perhaps because Mpande did not turn to her for advice or support. She may indeed have died lonely, or at least alienated from an institution where she once exhibited power. One possibility is that at 70-80 years old, she was beginning to feel the effects of her advancing age. However, it is also possible that Mpande, in consolidating his own power base, removed those who had supported his brother to make room for his own allies, including the *amakhosikazi* of Mnkabayi's generation. Mpande's own wives would also fill and run the *isigodhlo*, replacing many of the aging matriarchs, but the prestige and renown of these women never quite rivaled the legendary status of Mnkabayi.

### **Mawa's Crossing: Women's Responses to changes in Power**

Established elite women did not accept exclusion without resistance. Not long after Mpande ascended to the throne, Mnkabayi's sister Mawa was implicated in an attempt to oust the new *inkhosi*. Unfortunately for the elderly matriarch, her male champion within the Zulu family did not topple Mpande despite her influence and support. After Mpande caught wind of Mawa's betrayal, she fled with a large following from the eSigubudu hill (where it was rumored her protégé maintained an *isigodhlo* of his own) to the safety of British controlled Natal.<sup>213</sup> She and her following were intercepted by Mpande's forces, who forced half of her following to remain behind in

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<sup>212</sup> Although there is no exact date, Mnkabayi would be fairly old (around 70-80) by the 1840s, and may have simply died of natural causes. For a succinct survey see Liz Gunner, "Mnkabayi" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* vol. 4, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 254; Shamase, "Princess Mnkabayi," 4.

<sup>213</sup> Shamase, "Reign of King Mpande," 84.

KwaZulu.<sup>214</sup> Mawa's exodus was not new; there had been examples of powerful female figures leading large numbers of refugees away from an antagonistic chief in Shaka's time and before.<sup>215</sup> Mawa's departure to Natal can be understood as part of a larger migration of different family clans into the area recently opened within the newly annexed colony. In Natal, Mawa might have the opportunity to act more independently than in the *isigodhlo* of a man she had recently offended.

However, Mpande would not allow her to live in peace. On her departure Mawa and her followers had left with a large number of cattle that Mpande demanded repeatedly from Natal colonial officials.<sup>216</sup> This caused tension between the Natal Government and the Zulu king.<sup>217</sup> British officials would not have recognized Mawa as the rightful owner of these cattle, and in likelihood would have considered friendly relations with the powerful neighboring Zulu king to be more important than respecting the property rights of an African Queen. Mpande used his concern over Mawa's cattle as his reason for breaking with the treaties he had agreed to previously ceding land to the Colony of Natal. The cattle in question were eventually confiscated and returned to Mpande.<sup>218</sup> In the oral histories informants make it clear that it was not Mawa, but "the British [who] returned them [the cattle] all to Zulu country."<sup>219</sup> The Colonial Administration in Pietermaritzburg acted in their best interests, and marginalized the *inkhosikazi* in the process.

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<sup>214</sup> For accounts of Mpande's interception see JSA, 2:204-5; JSA, 2:56-57; JSA, 3:243; JSA, 4:332. For a sense of the political era see Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 130.

<sup>215</sup> Makedama, an *inkhosikazi* many years before, had led followers, first away from Shaka into Zwide's territory, and later onward after her female followers refused to join Zwide's *isigodhlo* JSA, 5:55, 61-2.

<sup>216</sup> The most specific demand by Mpande was made in 1846.

<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Shamase, "Reign of King Mpande," 165; JSA, 2:56-57; JSA, 2:204-205.

<sup>218</sup> Shamase, "Reign of King Mpande," 166.

<sup>219</sup> JSA, 2:56.

In Mpande's reign new *inkhosi* replaced the old guard of *amakhosikazi* who had overseen the successful functioning of Dingane's royal administration. These new officials may have been more inclined to negotiate with the increasingly relevant Port Natal Officials, and the persistent, land-hungry Boers, and so the *amakhosikazi* may have experienced marginalization. Mpande specifically removed particular *amakhosikazi*, like Bhibhi and trivialized others who became increasingly inconsequential, still others like Mawa sought to escape him to new prospects in Natal.<sup>220</sup> Increasingly, Zulu women like Mawa may have come into contact with the European social and cultural paradigm, which stripped them of the ability to independently hold and control property independently.<sup>221</sup> Mpande's wives would take over the role as the next generation of *amakhosikazi*, but none of them would hold the same prestige and power as did Mnkabayi and some of the other earlier generations of elite Zulu women.

During Dingane's reign, specific *amakhosikazi* from the generation of Senzangakhona's sisters and wives were able to position themselves as powerful administrators. The arrival of outsiders on the Highveld changed the dynamic of power over time and both internal and external militaristic operations led to Dingane's fall. *Amakhosikazi* were able to access power through Dingane, but became vulnerable after their champion's fall from power. Some women struck out for new opportunities in the Colony of Natal, but interaction with imperial powers with different cultural backgrounds may have marginalized their prestige.

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<sup>220</sup> JSA, 3:248, 260. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 170.

<sup>221</sup> For an interesting approach to the process of colonization see T. J. Tallie, "Queering Natal: Settler Logics and the Disruptive Challenge of Zulu Polygamy," *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 167-89.

## Part 4: Mpande, Civil War, and Shepstone (1840-1872)

### *Historical Overview*

In their summaries of the period between 1840 and 1872, historians run the risk of overshadowing Mpande and his ruling household beneath the turbulence of shifting social, economic and political organization. During this period, white settlers increased the intensity of their claims on Zulu territory, and the new British system of colonization (originated by Shepstone, but carried beyond him as well) altered the power structure of the entire Eastern Cape area.<sup>222</sup> Mawa's exodus was part of a larger shift of people leaving kwaZulu in search of better prospects available in the Natal Colony, particularly under the weakened rule of Mpande.<sup>223</sup> Some tributary chiefs left kwaZulu, like Mawa may have, in search of greater independence.

The Port of Natal had become Durban on 23 June 1835, and the short-lived Boer Republic of Natalia—started in 1840—officially transitioned to the Natal Colony in 1844.<sup>224</sup> The colony had a history of fewer strict guidelines regarding *ilobola* and no *amabutho* system like that which existed in kwaZulu, meaning that men could avoid extended time in the Zulu regiment, and start their own *imizi* much sooner.<sup>225</sup> In 1826 several hundred Africans lived in the Port of Natal, but by the 1850s the city's African population had swelled to 10,000.<sup>226</sup> Other African settlers lived South of the Thukela River and outside of Durban, in the area of Natalia, which was no longer at risk of

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<sup>222</sup> For a more extensive explanation of Shepstone's indirect ruling system see Laband *Rise and Fall*, 153.

<sup>223</sup> Mahoney posits that the Zulu kingdom would not regain the dominance and centralization that it had under Dingane. Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 49-52.

<sup>224</sup> For a truncated but well-researched description of the early history of the Natal enclaves see John Wright, "Turbulent Times." The Port of Natal became part of Natalia and then the British colony of Natal.

<sup>225</sup> Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 49.

<sup>226</sup> Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 49.

regular raids from tribute seeking Zulu forces. White farmers took advantage of the large labor pool, hiring (or enslaving) African settlers to run their huge farming tracts, so for a long time farmers encouraged migration. However, tensions arose between Zulu *amakhosi* trying to keep the wealth of cattle and human capital within their borders, and British officials concerned about armed black Africans, as well as maintaining dominance over the African settlers that vastly outnumbered the white population. Over the three decades of Mpande's rule, the Colony of Natal and growing Boer settlement to the north became increasingly powerful and influential in the region. In this atmosphere of externalizing power, Zulu-settler relations came to define much of the Zulu political arena, and would help to marginalize the elite *amakhosikazi* within the upper levels of Zulu social hierarchy.

Contemporaries of Mpande frequently ignored him as a simpleton or unambitious before his ascent to rule, but he outlived many of his family members including the powerful women who had subtly influenced the kingdom in the proceeding three decades. Early historians also overlooked him for his understated presence, but he ruled over the Zulu kingdom for the longest period of all the pre-colonial kings.<sup>227</sup> Mpande alone managed to survive the purges of both Shaka and Dingane. In his coastal stronghold he had maintained a small but secure power base, until pressure by Dingane in 1838, and an opportunity to partner with the Boers, gave him the opportunity to usurp his brother. Mpande kept an *isigodhlo* of some 500 women, many of whom had returned to his household after Dingane lost power.<sup>228</sup> The *isigodhlo* itself remained a highly respected place under his rule, maintaining the

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<sup>227</sup>In particular earlier works such as Bryant's write Mpande off as an ineffective ruler, perhaps because later in his reign his son was effectively chief. For an example see Bryant, *Olden Times*, 186.

<sup>228</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 136.

traditions upheld by his brothers and long before. For example, men were still forbidden from entering uninvited, and Mpande's advisor killed his own son for sleeping with the *inkhosi's* sacred *isigodhlo* girls.<sup>229</sup> However, Mpande relied less on the *amakhosikazi* to uphold his rule than his brother had. This may have been due to the fact that the abakwaZulu as a whole were less powerful, or perhaps, due to Mpande's preference for other male leaders. The majority of the *amakhosikazi* of the previous generation had disappeared, but there were some survivors of the prior order.

### **Langazana, Celibacy and the Inkatha Yezwe**

Langazana, one of Senzangakhona's wives who controlled an *ikhanda* during Dingane's rule, was the most prominent of the few *amakhosikazi* who remain visible in the oral narratives relating to Mpande's reign. She lived until 1884, after the defeat of KwaZulu by the British, at the *ikhanda* of esiKlebheni until its destruction in the civil wars that followed.<sup>230</sup> She was the keeper of the *inkatha yezwe* or "head ring of the nation," under Mpande.<sup>231</sup> *Inkatha* is the name for the head ring, a grass coil, which was presented to young Zulu men when they had reached a level of responsibility and maturity required for them to successfully marry and begin households of their own.

The *inkatha yezwe* was a specific sacred head ring that incorporated various powerful tokens from important and sacred moments in Zulu history, including

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<sup>229</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 128.

<sup>230</sup> *esiKlebheni* was the grave site of Senzangakhona and a place of great religious and spiritual importance to the Zulu. Langazana's position as custodian and keeper of this sacred spot indicates her position as a venerable Queen Mother. The *inkatha yezwe* was destroyed during the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 when the site was specifically targeted for its spiritual significance and therefore razed to the ground. Laband summarizes the event Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 63; for a more elaborate description from the British perspective see Byrant, *Zulu People*, 475-78; see also JSA, 2:211; JSA, 2:281-82.

<sup>231</sup> JSA, 2:203.



important battles or ceremonies.<sup>232</sup> It symbolized legitimacy of the Zulu royal household, through connection to the *amadlozi*, or ancestral spirits, and had traditionally been kept by powerful women in the royal house. Jennifer Weir has even gone so far as to suggest that these women were not just custodians, but possessors of the *inkatha yezwe*.<sup>233</sup> She proposes that the *amakhosikazi* were therefore spiritual authorities with the power to endorse rulers with ancestral approval, or potentially withhold that approval.<sup>234</sup> In his 1843 description of Langazana's *isigodhlo*, Adulphe Delegorgue, a French traveler/hunter from 1838-1843, refers to the women as a "sacred group."<sup>235</sup> Delegorgue's description suggests something of the religious importance of the *amakhosikazi* as conduits to ancestral approving spirits.<sup>236</sup>

Langazana was also one of the last of the unmarried royal women within the Zulu family. As evidenced by Mnkabayi, Mawa, and Mmama, some *amakhosikazi* maintained independent authority through their lives, perhaps in part by avoiding the hazards of direct involvement in political reproduction through marriage. These *amakhosikazi* positioned themselves as authorities within the ranks of their own powerful household, and while they may have lacked the official authority of a prescribed position, they would have been able to subtly enact their will upon the happenings within their respective *amakhanda* and importantly in the *isigodhlo*. This

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<sup>232</sup> For a more developed discussion about the *inkatha yezwe*, and Zulu nationalistic sentiment see Daphna Golan, "Inkatha and its use of the Zulu past," *History in Africa* 18, (1991): 113-26.

<sup>233</sup> Weir, "I shall Need to Use Her to Rule", 14-16.

<sup>234</sup> Weir bases most of her theories on the basis that the ancestors (*amadlozi* or *amathongo*) were at the heart of Zulu belief system, and therefore involved in social, economic and political life. Weir, "Whose Unkulunkulu, 207.

<sup>235</sup> Adulphe Delegorgue. *Travels in Southern Africa* vol. 2, ed. and trans. Fleur Webb. (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1997), 86-87.

<sup>236</sup> Delegorgue is to be taken with a grain of salt, as can be found in abundance in a review of his *Travels*. See Tiyanbe Zeleza, "Reviewed Work: *South Africa: Through the Eyes of a Nineteenth Century Tourist. Travels in South Africa. Volume 1* by Adulphe Delegorgue, Fleur Webb," *Research in African Literatures* 23, No. 3 (1992): 147-49.

role was contingent on each queen's ability to rely on powerful male relatives, or assets in her own right.<sup>237</sup> If her family had enough wealth she might position herself within the familial hierarchy to gain independent authority. However, if they lacked the resources, independence may be impossible, leading her to attach herself to a man who might offer security in exchange for her subordination. As the colonial authorities implemented European concepts of gender relations limits on women's power over resources may have been subtly restricted first in Natal, but increasingly influencing the surrounding areas.<sup>238</sup> After Langazana's generation almost all women within the Zulu royal family were married into different elite families. The result was that the women in the *isigodhlo* all had connections various elite families, and had sons who would become involved in disputes over inheritance. None had the same level of seniority she did over the new king, and all were linked to other rival households. Mpande's queens and daughters are not discussed as controlling *amakhanda* or commanding *amabutho* in the same way as Mnkabayi, Nandi, or Mawa. Nonetheless, these women did affect Zulu politics and maintain spaces of agency even if not so directly.

### **Mpande's Queens**

After years of bachelor-kings, it was a break for Mpande to have any wives.

Both Dingane and Shaka had remained single, and therefore sought to avoid the risks involved with allowing rival clans to infiltrate their familial hierarchy and produce heirs

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<sup>237</sup> Weir, "I shall need to use her to rule," 16-21.

<sup>238</sup> Transcripts of British colonial officers show them peppering Cetshwayo with questions about gender relations to demonstrate the imagined restrictions their laws perpetuated. Questions were intended to direct Cetshwayo towards claiming that all women of all classes or positions could not own property. Cetshwayo responds to this assumption by countering that states, "kingship falls to a female provided that she be the mother, grandmother or very important relation of the king." In colonial code these nuances seem to have been obscured in the interest of simplified organization and expediency. C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright, ed. and comp., *A Zulu King Speaks: Statements Made by Cetshwayo kaMpande on the History and Customs of his People* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1987), 110.

who might threaten Zulu hegemonic control. Mpande, however, had many wives who each came from different elite families in the area.<sup>239</sup> *Amakhosikazi* still played central roles in Stuart's informants' information about this period, and could be the focal point of political drama, but in stories relating to them they do not maintain the same respect or prestige. Possibly, elite African clan units found that encroaching white settlers responded to male heads of household more positively.<sup>240</sup> Or perhaps it was only the abakwaZulu, the ruling house, that lost its edge on other elite families, and married off most of the women in the *isigodhlo* to forge connections and alliances that had been lost. Mpande's reign was to be one characterized by increasingly factional rule, and he was less successful at obtaining tribute from subordinate groups. Territorial tributary chiefs followed the model of networking to gain influence, and challenged his right to rule. Perhaps marrying multiple daughters out to other families was a strategic move to stay connected with these chiefs, or hold them in subordinate positions. It may also be that these women were not senior enough, and were never afforded the opportunity to assert their authority as other channels for incurring favor or enforcing control became possible through relationships with settlers. It could be that as time went on Mpande discovered he could in fact rule without the aid of senior royal women and the religious and spiritual importance they signified. Or it could be that he could separate their temporal power from their role as symbols and repositories of power.

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<sup>239</sup> Wier makes an interesting assertion that both Dingane and Shaka worked to assume feminine attributes in order to usurp the power of their female family members and concentrate state authority solely on their own person as the asexual and all-powerful head chief. Wier, "I Shall Need to Use her to Rule," 3-23.

<sup>240</sup> Natasha Erlank's piece on the Commission on Native Laws and Customs, while based somewhat after the period in question, accurately describes some of the obscuring effects of colonial codification. Natasha Erlank, "Gendering Commonality: African Men and the 1883 Commission on Native Law and Customs," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 4 (2003): 937-55.

Even without the commanding authority of Mnkabayi or Nandi, *amakhosikazi* continued to play visible roles around succession on the stage of political drama. Kuper posits that Mpande took four principal wives, Ngqumbazi, Nomantshali, Fudukazi, and Gudayi—along with numerous lesser wives and their daughters.<sup>241</sup> Their sons would jostle for territory, followers, and cattle with the support of their respective matriclans. In these tense succession attempts Mpande’s strategy largely involved playing his sons off of each other in order to remain on top. In the hierarchy of the *isigodhlo* social positioning of their mothers, who also carried the titles of *amakhosikazi*, was critical to the success of the prospective princes. Unlike the unmarried older generation of women, Mpande’s wives had married into the Zulu royal family and as such they had ties to other families and obligations to their various clans, but also power within those clans that acted as an avenue of agency.

Mpande avoided naming a “great wife” until 1839 when he was under pressure from Dingane and had escaped into settler controlled territory near Port Natal.<sup>242</sup> With war and potential death at hand, he declared Ngqumbazi his “great wife” and therefore made her eldest son, Cetshwayo, the heir apparent.<sup>243</sup> It was common practice for powerful men such as Mpande to avoid naming a great wife until late in their lives so as to avoid overbearing heirs and the possibility of premature death. The previous rulers, Shaka and Dingane, had both ignored the rules of succession that conventionally gave the eldest son of a great wife the right to rule, and had taken power outside of general

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<sup>241</sup> See fig. 6; Kuper, “The ‘House,’” 482.

<sup>242</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 136. Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 13.

<sup>243</sup> This is significant in and of itself. Usually the “great wife” position was determined by the relationship between the two families, and the nature of the *ilobola* received in exchange for marriage. Perhaps this was made possible by the state of emergency that Mpande felt, but it is uncertain. JSA, 2:165; JSA, 2:215-16.

recognized practice. In naming Ngqumbazi the ‘Great Wife,’ Mpande designated Cetshwayo as his heir, and thus the greatest potential threat to his authority.

*Cetshwayo, Ngqumbazi and the uSuthu*

As Cetshwayo grew older, he became extremely popular and powerful, with the military and political support of his mother Ngqumbazi’s people, the amaZungu, a chieftaincy to the north that paid tribute to the Zulu royal house.<sup>244</sup> Cetshwayo’s power base was located in the north at kwaGqikazi, the *ikhanda* that his mother Ngqumbazi looked over, and an important Northern boundary stronghold for the kingdom as a whole.<sup>245</sup> Mpande tried to separate mother and son to “keep [Cetshwayo] from building up a following.”<sup>246</sup> Mpande’s efforts were in vain. Cetshwayo garnered a loyal group of peers, known as the “uSuthu” after campaigns against the Swazi to control the Pongola region. Additionally, as the resident *amakhosikazi* in the region his mother was also “especially loved by the people”.<sup>247</sup> Cetshwayo’s supporters, and later those who supported the Zulu ruling house, would be known as the uSuthu. This can be understood as part of the gradual dissolution of the Zulu royal family’s control over kwaZulu as individual *amakhosi*, supported by loyal followers, took on their own identities and competed to assert themselves.

Through her high social standing Ngqumbazi provided a crucial link to legitimacy for her son. As the daughter of another chiefly house, Ngqumbazi would have had access to powerful political connections within the Zungu clan. Of equal

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<sup>244</sup> Zungu soldiers assisted Cetshwayo in battle in 1856, and the chiefdom would still be around in the 1890s when British colonials distributed land to small chiefdoms. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 144, 431; JSA, 4:380.

<sup>245</sup> JSA, 3:196. Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 16.

<sup>246</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 143-55.

<sup>247</sup> Felix Okoye, “Dingane: a Reappraisal,” *Journal of African History* 10, no. 1 (1969): 95.

importance she had connections to Shaka as first a member of his *isigodhlo*, perhaps under the watchful eye of Nandi herself, before she was presented to Mpande in recognition of his military support, as part of his integration into Shaka's approved inner circle.<sup>248</sup> Cetshwayo was likely born around 1832, several years after Shaka's death, but the young prince appealed to Shaka's relationship to his mother to justify his rightful place as ruler.<sup>249</sup> Cetshwayo's powerbase revolved around his mother's residence, and her family members helped to ensure her son's success. Although the sources are vague on the extent of her influence over her son, she certainly served as keeper of the symbolic and physical core of her son's influence. Jeff Guy's historical narrative generally presents Cetshwayo, as a capable and intelligent young military leader, was able to accumulate followers. However, his proximity to his mother and the fact that Mpande deliberately tried to separate them mother from child suggest that she, and other family members in the Zungu clan were a large part of his success.

By the 1850s Mpande had become leery of his over mighty young heir, who capitalized on encroaching Boer trekkers expanding their claims on territory in the vicinity of the Ncome (Blood) River in contentious Zulu-controlled area to appeal to anti-settler sentiment and gather more followers.<sup>250</sup> To offset his son's quickly growing popularity and military prowess Mpande tried to open diplomatic relations in Natal in 1856, in an evident attempt to enlist their aid. He even began tolerating trekker

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<sup>248</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 137.

<sup>249</sup> Specifically Shaka gave the *ilobola* for Ngqumbazi to her family thereby securing her position. This was likely a political move to secure the loyalty of the Zungu people to his position, but as Shaka himself did not take wives Mpande would have served as a substitute. Shaka's reign was considered to be the height of the Kingdom's extent by this point and a legitimate relationship, and apparently approval, from the dead king confirmed Cetshwayo's claim to the throne. JSA, 2:189-90; JSA, 3:106; see also Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 136.

<sup>250</sup> Mpande complains to British officials about his son's independent power and support base. P. A. Kennedy, "The Fatal Diplomacy: Sir Theophilus Shepstone and the Zulu Kings 1839-1879" (PhD Thesis, University of Southern California 1976), 156.

advances into disputed territory in the hope that they would side with him against his son.<sup>251</sup> He also began grooming another son by his favorite wife, Monase, as a potential rival to Cetshwayo. Monase was the daughter of Mntungwa of the Nxumalo clan, another tributary chiefdom to the south of the kingdom. Monase's son also claimed authority through his connections to Shaka.<sup>252</sup> Originally, Monase had been an *isigodhlo* girl whom Shaka had reputedly impregnated and subsequently given to Mpande, at least according to Mpande himself.<sup>253</sup> Mbuyazi, Monase's son, therefore claimed that he was the rightful son of Shaka and better suited to rule than the aggressive Cetshwayo. Mbuyazi's mother was the crucial link for his pretension to rule as a continuity of the Zulu royal bloodline from its base with Shaka.<sup>254</sup> The powerful amaNxumalo were also a strong support to Mbuyazi and stood with him in contest against Cetshwayo.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1856 the brothers finally met in battle near the Ndondakusuka hill.<sup>255</sup> Although Mbuyazi had both Mpande's army, his uncle's support, and several white traders under the command of John Dunn to aid him, his party was vastly outnumbered. Cetshwayo's forces trapped Mbuyazi and his followers against the turbulent Thukela River, and annihilated the would-be King and five other half-brothers on its banks.<sup>256</sup> Monase managed to escape with her brother, Chief Sothondose, to British-controlled territory in 1857 along with two other princes, Mkhungo and

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<sup>251</sup> Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 126.

<sup>252</sup> Trevor A. Cope, *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems*, 209-210.

<sup>253</sup> Mpande called Mbuyazi "the son of Tshaka king of the earth" when legitimizing his claims. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 136. See also JSA, 4:301.

<sup>254</sup> Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 17.

<sup>255</sup> John Labland, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars*, 201.

<sup>256</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 142-146.

Sikhotha.<sup>257</sup> Despite these escapes, in the aftermath it was clear that Cetshwayo had asserted himself as the prevailing military might in KwaZulu. Mpande had given Mbuyazi control of the majority of his forces, and Cetshwayo's decisive victory effectively made the prince and his uSuthu clan into the de facto authority within the Zulu royal house.

#### *Nomantshali and Women's Mysticism*

This contest was not the last threat to succession that Cetshwayo would face. By 1860 Mpande had a new favorite wife, a junior wife from the house of Ngqumbazi herself, who would loom dangerously over Cetshwayo's intentions of supremacy once again.<sup>258</sup> Her name was Nomantshali and it was said that Mpande began to ignore all of his other wives and duties for her.<sup>259</sup> Rumors began to circulate that she had "bewitched" the elderly *inkhosi* with a love potion, and that she was using him to further the ambitions of her young sons.<sup>260</sup> One of Stuart's informants refers to a curse that Nomantshali performed which made Ngqumbazi, the 'Great Wife' begin to grow a beard.<sup>261</sup> Cetshwayo, only four years out from meeting Mbuyazi in battle, thought that her threat was viable enough to take action. In March of 1861 he ordered well-respected members of his *amabutho* to go to Nomantshali's residence to kill her and her young sons before they had a chance to become a real threat that could turn the tide of familial

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<sup>257</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 146.

<sup>258</sup> Bhibhi, the favorite wife of Senzangakhona, was also from the Bhele family. JSA, 2:189-90.

<sup>259</sup> See fig. 1, an image of Nomantshali drawn by Colenso when visiting at Mpande's request. John William Colenso, *First Steps of the Zulu Mission* (London: The Society for the Propagation of the gospel, 1860) 113-116.

<sup>260</sup> JSA, 4:63; JSA, 3:106; JSA, 2:207.

<sup>261</sup> JSA, 4:63.



approval against him.<sup>262</sup> The assassination was a horribly bungled affair. Cetshwayo's retinue embarrassed him by violently berating Mpande, and killing one of Nomantshali's sons right in front of the aging king when they could not find the young boy's mother.<sup>263</sup> Nomantshali took refuge with Langazana, but the old Queen, who had been currying favor with Cetshwayo, betrayed her and his soldiers killed her in a field.<sup>264</sup> His actions disturbed the British officials, shocked the Zulu population, and caused Cetshwayo to express regret many years later.<sup>265</sup>

Nomantshali's story presents an interesting vignette of women's power as it was enacted in 1860s Zulu politics. Nomantshali was specifically targeted because of her challenge to Cetshwayo's position, expressed through her feminine and mystical authority. Her sons were both still children, and posed little serious challenge to the full-grown Cetshwayo without their mother, but Nomantshali had access to the ailing king, and her ability to influence him posed a critical hazard to Cetshwayo's plans.

Nomantshali signified a feminine spiritual connection to unseen powers, which could be mobilized to enact her will and assert control into spheres dominated by male power. Although the British may have dismissed her ability to place a love-spell on Mpande, the threat of curses and magic was a serious matter within Zulu society.<sup>266</sup> It is also clear that the offense Nomantshali committed towards Ngqumbazi by showing her disrespect, and cursing her with a symbol of masculinity (a beard), could transfer into

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<sup>262</sup> In what is Captain J. Rushcombe Poole's interpretation of Cetshwayo's story about this affair Mpande's infatuation with Nomantshali is attributed to his "feeble mind," however considering how seriously women's witchcraft was taken, for example the cattle killing in Xhosa tribes in 1856, it is unlikely that most Africans took the possibility of a love potion so lightly. Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 17.

<sup>263</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 157-58; Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 226-28.

<sup>264</sup> JSA, 2:190; JSA, 3:106; Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 188-90.

<sup>265</sup> Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 17.

<sup>266</sup> Weir expands more on the ideological and religious significance of the *amakhosikazi*. Weir, "I Shall Need to Use her to Rule," 10-15.

an insult and challenge to Cetshwayo as well. The hierarchy within the *isigodhlo* was indicative of the hierarchy of princes and therefore powerful clans and the ultimate authority in the kingdom. Nomantshali was not the only one with this power. Monase was also considered capable of enacting magic. In 1867 Cetshwayo accused her of causing drought in KwaZulu that killed a number of cattle and further impoverished the country.<sup>267</sup> The connection to other worlds had functioned as part of women's power within Zulu society since before Shaka's ascension in 1816.<sup>268</sup> Although this may have seemed absurd to colonists unless expressed through their theology, mystical control through spiritual connection would have been very real to many of people inside kwaZulu, but across the border in Natal as well.

### **Shepstone and Zulu Succession**

The British colonial administration was acutely concerned with the battle of Nondasuka, and later shifts in Zulu authority. They feared the possibility of an uprising by the black population of Natal, or an imagined unified attack from the strong African states that surrounded them. This anxiety about a combination of states was a constant refrain through the late nineteenth century despite clear distrust between the amaZulu and other rulers like Faku of the amaMpondo. Cetshwayo in particular seemed to be antagonistic towards the Natal, and a Zulu state under his control might prove unsavory to the fledgling colony according to this logic.<sup>269</sup> Theophilus Shepstone, the Secretary

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<sup>267</sup> Cetshwayo to the govt. of Natal, in Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 337.

<sup>268</sup> Ntombazi chief Zwide's mother was rumored to keep skulls of defeated enemies in her house and use magic to influence her son, Shaka burned down her house in 1821 because of the threat she posed as a sorceress; see JSA, 1:13; JSA, 1:14, 30-31.

<sup>269</sup> In correspondence between Shepstone and Henry Fynn they each express concern about an impending invasion. At one point Fynn refers to a conversation with the recently exiled Monase in which he reports, "Moase said, 'Cetshwayo waits only for the death of Panda [Mpande] to assume chieftainship.'" Fynn to Shepstone, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1857, quoted in Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 140.

of Native Affairs, saw a distinct possibility in the escape of the younger princes from their vengeful brother. He placed Monase's thirteen year-old son Mukhungo under the protection of Bishop John William Colenso in June of 1857, as insurance against Cetshwayo's aggressions.<sup>270</sup> If Cetshwayo and his forces should go so far as to dispose of the aging Mpande, the colony of Natal would support the claim of Monase's younger son against him.<sup>271</sup> Shepstone had inserted the British colonial government squarely into Zulu successional politics. His actions were to become increasingly common in Africa – fracturing unity at points of succession when authority was contested.

Shepstone's actions were not unprecedented. He had already taken a decisive role in Qwabe succession in 1849, and had increasingly asserted his authority over various African groups in the Eastern Cape.<sup>272</sup> His tactic in taking charge of the fugitive princes is clear in this excerpt of a letter between himself and the Governor and High Commissioner in Cape Town, Sir George Grey, who was himself an avowed enemy of "traditional" chiefly rule:

If ever the British Government interferes, as I imagine some day it must, in the affairs of Zululand [KwaZulu], a youth like this [Mukhungo], civilised, and Christianized, would surely be the person whose claim would be most likely to receive our support, more especially as he is even now regarded, both by friends and foes, as the rightful successor to Mpande 's authority."<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Bishop Colenso resided at *Ekukhunyeni* (The Place of Light) where Mpande's son Sikhotha by another wife named Masala was already in residence. JSA, 4:86-7; JSA, 4:284. See also Kennedy, *Fatal Diplomacy*, 133.

<sup>271</sup> In a letter to Lieutenant Governor of Natal Scott, Shepstone specifically states, "It would be bet for us to have Pandas family in our possession. Shepstone to Scott 4 December, 1856. S.N.A. 1/3/6 N.A. For a full account of the response in Natal to the battle of Ndongakusuka see Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 124-46.

<sup>272</sup> As early as 1849 Shepstone acted to involved the British colonial government in Qwabe succession. Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 55.

<sup>273</sup> S.N.A. 1/6/3, N.A.: Colenso to Grey. 8 August [1857: S.P.S. Colenso to the Secretary. 8 August 1857, pg. 334. cited in Shamase, "Reign of King Mpande," 183.

Not only would civilizing and Christianizing the young prince have moved him closer to Shepstone and the British western civilization, it would also essentially alienate him from his mother from Monase, and important aspects of Zulu culture.

Documents written by Shepstone clearly show that he was aware of the general practice of Zulu succession, but he maintained a calculated non-recognition of Ngqumbazi as Mpande's great wife in order to negate Cetshwayo's rightful claim.<sup>274</sup> Not out of deference to Mpande, Shepstone was trying to keep the uSuthu, who were now effectively the dominant force in the region, from overthrowing Mpande and seizing power. Over the course of the next two decades he would continue to insert himself into Zulu politics as the overlord and 'Father to the King's Children' an ideology, which fit well into British notions of racial superiority and Christianizing moral authority.<sup>275</sup> Within the Zulu nation Shepstone effectively asserted himself as a rival of Cetshwayo, but perhaps in a more acceptable way than a rival heir would be. As such, Shepstone designated himself with the authority to weigh-in on issues of succession. By 1872, when Mpande died, Cetshwayo enlisted Shepstone to perform a ceremonial coronation, because his influence was so widely recognized.<sup>276</sup>

While Cetshwayo envisioned the coronation itself as an indication of alignment and approval from a powerful ally, Shepstone saw it as an affirmation of his authority

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<sup>274</sup> Kennedy, "Fatal Diplomacy," 140.

<sup>275</sup> For a complete analysis of Shepstone's metaphoric role as "Father" to the Zulu and his assertion that he alone could legitimize kingship see Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*, 94-98. See also Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35-95.

<sup>276</sup> The coronation itself was a very politically charged event wherein Cetshwayo was attempting to assert his authority over various other African contenders through a formal reception of British endorsement. Shepstone and other British officials, however, would later use the ceremony as a formal indication of their suzerainty over the Zulu nation. For a complete account see Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 153; Norman Etherington, "The 'Shepstone System' in the colony of Natal and beyond the borders in Duminy and Guest," *Natal and Zululand*, 170-181. Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African Autonomy and Settler Colonialism in the Making of Traditional Authority* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

over Zulu succession. Regardless of the intentions of both male parties, Shepstone's actions demonstrate that he had effectively insinuated colonial involvement in succession to the point where it could surpass the elite women in the Zulu household. Shepstone had already demonstrated that in particular instances he was capable of inserting himself in Zulu succession by ignoring the authority Ngqumbazi, as the designated "great wife," to produce the heir to Mpande. He also began to raise a champion of his own in the form of the young Mkhungo sheltered by the Colenso Family. Here, Shepstone again asserted himself by legitimizing Cetshwayo.

What may have ultimately proved most damaging to women's power, would be foreign dismantling of women's roles in succession and royal reproduction. Although not Shepstone's aim, his actions alienated the *amakhosikazi* from their very sacred roles as heir bearers and legitimizers of royal males. Cetshwayo was not punished by the British colonials for murdering Nomantshali in 1861, and even Mpande was helpless to stop their son's death as the boy cried in his arms.<sup>277</sup> This instance would indicate that in the shifting balance of authority and power in kwaZulu. The ability to position heirs and give birth had been a crux of women's involvement in Zulu house politics, but with Shepstone's and Dunn's interventions they became increasingly sidelined in favor of powerful and armed outsiders. This British involvement, perhaps not intentionally, effectively attenuated women's roles as legitimizers within clan politics.

Cetshwayo would remain formally subordinate to Mpande until the latter's death in 1872. Up until that point Mpande managed to keep his hold on the KwaZulu partially by pitting his most dominant son against the Boers and the British, but also

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<sup>277</sup> This version of the story given by a close advisor to one of Nomantshali's sons in Natal. JSA, 2:189-190.

through calculated negotiations with Shepstone.<sup>278</sup> Mpande eventually died of what were evidently natural causes in 1872. When Cetshwayo ceremoniously declared himself king not long afterwards, it was British approval of his administration that he negotiated to maintain validity as the new sovereign. In the years of joint rule with Mpande, from 1856 until 1872, regional territorial chiefs exercised increased independence and frequently dismissed Cetshwayo's calls to their *amabutho* for service. In 1872, in defense of his supremacy and emphasis of British alliance, he called on Shepstone to legitimize his new rule. When compared to Shaka's 1816 appointment to chieftaincy by Mnkabayi and Senzangakhona's widows, it is clear that the sixty intervening years had witnessed a shift in women's power roles within the Zulu royal household, and perhaps throughout KwaZulu and Natal.

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<sup>278</sup>John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton, "Ethnicity and Political Change Before 1840," in *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*, ed. Robert Morrell (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996), 15-32.

## **Part 5: Cetshwayo's Coronation Until the Anglo-Zulu War 1872-1879**

### *Historical overview*

Although Cetshwayo formally took power in 1872, he had ruled jointly with his father since 1856. As such, there was continuity across his coronation ceremony. However, during the last ten years of Mpande's rule, the aging king exacerbated regional fissures, and these would continue to pose trouble for Cetshwayo. Missionaries, invited by Mpande, brought trade into kwaZulu, but Cetshwayo was suspicious of their relationship with the colony of Natal and at times was openly hostile. In addition, British imperialists were consolidating their domination throughout the majority of South Africa, and in the late 1870s turned their attention more earnestly toward extending their influence in the northeast. After the 1868 annexation of Basutoland and the Drakensburg Mountains, a precedent was set for expanding into the interior. To the north, the fiercely independent Boer republics faced instability, bankruptcy, and aggression, exacerbated by the discovery of diamonds near Kimberly in 1866.<sup>279</sup> Despite incessant disputes in their governments, individual Boers continued to capitalize on opportunities to expand their claims into Zulu territory. Boer relations with Cetshwayo were uneasy, at best. Cetshwayo may have experienced continuity in his reign, but accelerating interest and hostility between neighboring states and fragmentation within his own kingdom would soon erupt into violence.

In April 1877, the balance of power shifted when Shepstone carried a special warrant, annexing the Transvaal Republic. His warrant reasoned that the state was

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<sup>279</sup> For a survey of the general history, see Norman Etherington et al, "From Colonial Hegemonies to Imperial Conquest, 1840–1880," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa* vol. 1, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 319-91.

unstable, but it also was probably influenced by British desire for access to rich mining opportunities and land. Shepstone's approach to relations with the native populations then shifted dramatically as his concerns expanded to encompass the two states sandwiching kwaZulu. With the annexation of the ZAR, some statesmen (including Shepstone) began to feel as though kwaZulu stood in the way of a confederation of British states in South Africa. In London, the Tory administration under Disraeli could ill afford to start a costly war, despite the rumblings of the impending scramble for Africa.<sup>280</sup> Nonetheless, the ambitious Sir Bartle Frere, newly made governor of the Cape Colony, resolved to make good his orders to consolidate the British colonies, Boer republics, and native states. Concluding that the hostile Cetshwayo posed the most pressing threat to this and relying on paternalistic explanation, Frere issued an ultimatum intended to force the reluctant king into battle, altering the fate of the entire Zulu region. He invaded on January 11, 1879. Despite surprising the British forces with Zulu military might at the famous battle of Isandlwana, Cetshwayo's forces would ultimately be defeated after a decisive British victory on July 4, wherein the king's *ikhanda* Ulundi was razed to the ground. The humiliated king would be exiled to Cape Town and his lands partitioned by his conquerors.

The preceding narrative encompasses many of the developments occurring across the Eastern Cape, but it—and other traditional narratives—lack a curiosity about the gender relationships within the states in question.<sup>281</sup> From Cetshwayo's official

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<sup>280</sup> For more information on the Transvaal and British politics, see Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Transvaal* (London: Heinemann, 1982). See also Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 308-22.

<sup>281</sup> For an introduction to some of the broader arguments regarding gender and South African history, see Helen Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, ca. 1806-70," *Journal of African History* 37 (1996): 351-70.



coronation until his exile, the *amakhosikazi* and other women in his *isigodhlo* continued to live with, cook for, and influence the king. Although none of his wives garnered the reputation and authority that Mnkabayi once enjoyed, there are snippets of stories that hint at the ways that they, along with non-elite women, interacted with the men in their lives as provisional figures, subtle (and less subtle) manipulators, and subordinates. They continued to hold lesser control over succession disputes, acted as co-conspirators and rumor makers, and were essential to daily life across the kingdom. Unfortunately, the James Stuart Archive becomes less useful in this period, and relying on colonial documents reveals only partial understandings of women's roles. However, despite the challenge posed by fugitive information in the historical sources, interesting questions regarding the experiences of Zulu royal women can still shed new light on the subject.

### **Issues with the James Stuart Archive during later periods**

Although his interviews begin in the 1890s, the quality of James Stuart's questions changes as they steer towards topics contemporary with his own experience in Natal and in British-controlled KwaZulu, from 1868 until 1942. His choice of topics is focused on clarifying specific events or relates to particular political occurrences between Zulu figures.<sup>282</sup> The questions rarely involve women, even as informants, and the corresponding responses therefore display a gender imbalance. While Stuart probed many of his informants for details about the venerable Mnkabayi or Nandi, he asked very few questions pertaining to Mpande's wives and even fewer concerning

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<sup>282</sup> Cobbing is much more scathing in his judgments of Stuart, especially with regard to his tendency to ask leading questions and write interviews from memory, and his obvious bias toward avoiding questions that might shed poor light on his fellow British colonials. Cobbing, "A Tainted Well," 128-33.

Cetshwayo's family.<sup>283</sup> Details about Nomantshali, whose murder confirmed settler concerns about the "savagery" of black Africans, are offered readily by the informants, but are hardly broached by Stuart himself.<sup>284</sup> Stuart paid particular attention to information about early Zulu history, probably due to his intention of creating a history of the Zulu, but he was less meticulous when it came to asking informants to describe their everyday experiences. One of the net results of this appears to be a lack of information about women in the late nineteenth century, a consequence of Stuart actually doing the interviews pertaining to that period.

There are several possible reasons that the nature of Stuart's interviews changed in a way that makes them less fruitful for studying women's spaces of agency. One possibility is that, as Stuart's subject matter became more proximal in time to his present, he had to be increasingly tactful in his questioning. A colonial magistrate himself, Stuart was effectively usurping an element of the judicial powers that had previously rested with the *amakhosi* he interviewed.<sup>285</sup> In certain instances, some of his informants may have been hesitant to tell Stuart details about a particularly sensitive story. They also may have changed their stories in order to appeal to a bureaucratic, colonial audience.

Stuart also potentially biased his interviews toward validating his own experiences. As a contemporary, he could have witnessed events himself and therefore deemed it unnecessary to ask questions about particular events, practices, or places. If

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<sup>283</sup> The richest example of Nomantshali's story in the *James Stuart Archives* was produced spontaneously during one of Stuart's interviews without his prompting. JSA 2:189-90.

<sup>284</sup> For British response to Nomantshali's assassination, see Kennedy, *Fatal Diplomacy*, 188-90.

<sup>285</sup> Magistrates like Stuart were regular enforcers of British colonial authority in kwaZulu. In an example of this, in an 1888 deputation to the Natal governor Henry Havelock, Dinuzulu's supporters complained that Zulu people were "not used to Magistrates" and that therefore the traditional system of law enforcement should be strengthened. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 387.

Stuart had been to a battle, or had received an account from a fellow colonist, he might have privileged these accounts as a more legitimate form of knowledge.<sup>286</sup> His primary aim was to extract knowledge from his Zulu sources to fill gaps. Thus he would have found it unnecessary to ask about things he felt he already understood, even if his perspective was limited. Inherent in his bias was a misdirected concern for women as a category, but a disinterest in women as individuals in his works.<sup>287</sup> For example, in the 1881 commission on Cetshwayo, the humbled king was interrogated for an extended period of time about the economic and legal status of “wives,” “daughters,” or “women.”<sup>288</sup> But specific female figures, including his wives, are completely ignored. Colonial officers administering the social experience of black South Africans failed to recognize the sources of women’s power as understood by the Zulu society.

Stuart mostly interviewed men, and therefore might also have privileged male knowledge. Male and female spheres in Zulu society were concerned with different aspects of economic, political, and social life, thereby allowing both genders spaces of power, although there is considerably more overlap than has historically been suggested. For example, certain areas in Zulu culture -- the *isigodhlo*, for example -- were largely restricted to women. Just as this physical area was restricted, so too social norms and taboos may have restricted Stuart’s informants, who were generally politically powerful Zulu men, from discussing *amakhosikazi* with a white bureaucratic outsider. The men Stuart interviewed for information (African or otherwise) might not

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<sup>286</sup> Cobbing discusses examples of leading questions that lend false support to existing assumptions on his part. Cobbing, “A Tainted Well,” 127.

<sup>287</sup> In the case of Nandi, for example, Stuart would ask follow-up questions more frequently to those who responded positively, Cobbing, “A Tainted Well,” 128. See also JSA, 2:292-93; JSA, 3:79, 92.

<sup>288</sup> Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 82, 97.

have been privy to the drama unfolding within the confines of the *isigodhlo*.<sup>289</sup> On the few occasions when the informant is a woman, her insights prove incredibly valuable. Baleka, a female informant born in 1856, provides one of the richest interviews for this study, because of her particular perspective into the traditions of the female elite.<sup>290</sup> However, her testimony does not outweigh the general tendency towards a male-dominated perspective in Stuart's transcripts, both in the interviewer and the interviewees. Nor does it change the decline in specific information that can be found pertaining to royal women.

### **Tension in the Zulu State and the *iNgcugce* Marriages**

Stuart's archives may obscure women's power and knowledge, but the evidence raises possibilities as to what may have been left out. In examining the increased tension that arose between Cetshwayo and his neighboring *amakhosi*, particularly Hamu and Zibhebhu, there are suggestions that spaces of agency might be fugitive from Stuart's interviews.<sup>291</sup> Hamu was the eldest son of Mpande; though, due to *ukuvuza* (a practice of producing heirs for deceased brothers), Hamu was heir not to Mpande, his biological father, but Mpande's eldest brother, Nzibe, who had died in 1828.<sup>292</sup> Hamu oversaw a large region in the northwestern part of KwaZulu, and although he had fought with Cetshwayo in 1856, during the 1860s he became increasingly independent, even trading firearms with British trader Henry Nunn. Zibhebhu was Cetshwayo's most

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<sup>289</sup> While a large number of Stuart's informants were *induna*, or other Zulu peoples, he also kept up a dedicated correspondence with other colonial officials in his pursuit of accurate information. See Eldredge, *Creation*, 298-325.

<sup>290</sup> Eldredge, *Creation*, 298. JSA, 1:4-14.

<sup>291</sup> Hamu was also a son of Mpande, although because of the custom of *ukuvuza* he was heir not to Mpande, but to his eldest brother, Nzibe, who had died in 1828 and for whom Mpande was "raising seed." Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 141, 147-48.

<sup>292</sup> See Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars*, 109-10.

formidable rival. Although Zibhebhu's father had been a staunch supporter of Cetshwayo, his son was to prove a persistent threat to the Zulu royal line.<sup>293</sup> Based in the northeastern region of KwaZulu, Zibhebhu also resisted Cetshwayo and repeatedly attempted to assert his independence. These tensions are generally discussed in terms of the reluctance of these *amakhosi* to raise their regional *amabutho* for service to Cetshwayo.<sup>294</sup> The tension also is explored as a factor of the regional chiefs' reluctance to pay tribute in the form of cattle and their willingness to navigate relations with settlers and Boers independently of the young king. However, there also is evidence that would indicate that the reluctance of *amabutho* to respond to Cetshwayo was not limited to the male regiments.

Some of the tension between the Zulu headman and his *amakhosi* had to do with issues of marriage, which was key to the Zulu *amabutho* system and the *inkhosi enkulu*'s ability to mobilize armed forces, and which implicates both men and women. The king controlled when and who should be allowed to marry, and to whom. At his behest, a male *ibutho* would be deemed old enough to put on the *inkatha*, and therefore could begin a homestead of his own, collecting cattle and wives. These men often would be paired with an *ibutho* of women who were deemed available to marry, though these women could marry into older established houses as well.<sup>295</sup> Cetshwayo alone had the power to release the *amabutho* from his service to allow them to enter into marriage, which would be announced at the annual *umKhosi*, or first fruits festival, in the month

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<sup>293</sup> Dinuzulu, Cetshwayo's son and the last of the Zulu kings to oversee KwaZulu before it was annexed by the British in 1887, held a particular hatred for Zibhebhu, who had humiliated him while the juvenile prince was under his supervision between 1879 and 1883. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 345; Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 3.

<sup>294</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 178-9.

<sup>295</sup> See Adam Kuper, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 35-50.

of December. The king could not do so in a completely arbitrary way, as is made clear in his 1881 commission testimony, but he did have the ultimate power of approval.<sup>296</sup> The *amabutho* system was vital to maintaining tribute in the form of extracted labor and hinged on the king's ability to impose control over marriage and the resulting distribution of cattle through the *ilobola*. Cetshwayo stated that were he to allow his control over marriage laws to slip, he "would be a shadow instead of a king."<sup>297</sup> One of the great temporal landmarks of the 1870s, so influential that it would gain the social-cultural importance of the "Crossing of Mawa," would involve Cetshwayo's control over women and a demonstration of female resistance.

The particular marriage in question was the *iNgcugce* marriage. At the *umKhosi* in 1875, Cetshwayo gave permission for an older male *ibutho* to marry the female *iNgcugce* (the name of the women's age grade regiment) *ibutho* who was approximately 13-16 years younger than her intended husband.<sup>298</sup> At this time, it was common practice for unmarried women to maintain several lovers from the unmarried male *amabutho*.<sup>299</sup> While precautions were taken against pregnancy, these longstanding relationships sometimes posed problems if the girl was promised to an *ibutho* who was much older than her lover.<sup>300</sup> After all, envy is not specific to the present day. In this particular case, the *iNgcugce* girls objected to their intended husbands, who were so much older. The girls also expressed concern that there were not enough men to go around, complaining

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<sup>296</sup> Webb and Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks*, 79-82.

<sup>297</sup> Webb and Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks*, 72-83.

<sup>298</sup> Eileen Krige, *The Social Systems of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1974), 406-7.

<sup>299</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 176.

<sup>300</sup> JSA, 4:299-300, 338.

that “the necklace is not long enough to fit around the neck.”<sup>301</sup> In defiance of Cetshwayo’s command, many of these girls refused offers to marry.

The women of the offending *ibutho* were not directly confronting Cetshwayo or designing a specific rubric in opposition to their king; however, their collective snub did disrupt the usual sequence of events in Zulu society. Female *amabutho* in general were not concentrated in a specific location, but remained within their father’s *imizi*, although they infrequently did come together for large ceremonial purposes. Hanretta relies on questionable evidence from Mtshayankomo in his suggestion that Mpande worked with girls’ fathers to punish them and therefore, “although the creation of women’s *amabutho* did not significantly affect the ways in which men and women related on a cultural or social level, it could exert oppressive authority over women’s powers at times.”<sup>302</sup>

While this was likely true of the fathers who pressured their daughters into marriage to avoid fines, the *iNgcugce* act of refusal poses a challenge to the assumption of Zulu women as passive participants in men’s lives. The action was certainly circumscribed; it suggests that girls were not simply married at their father’s behest. In fact, Cetshwayo laughed at the idea that men have daughters simply to enrich themselves through *ilobola*.<sup>303</sup> In his research into the matter, Bishop Colenso found that it was not just women, but their relatives as well, who conspired to keep their girls from the fate of marrying men significantly older than themselves.<sup>304</sup> The women of the *iNgcugce ibutho* did not directly challenge Cetshwayo or the senior male suitors, but by declining

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<sup>301</sup> JSA, 4:132.

<sup>302</sup> Hanretta, “Women Marginality,” 408.

<sup>303</sup> Webb and Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks*, 82.

<sup>304</sup> In his report on the incident, Lieutenant Governor Bulwer states, “Various devices were resorted to by marriageable girls and by their relatives and lovers.” *British Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter simply BPP), Correspondence respecting the war between the Transvaal Republic and neighbouring native tribes, 1877, C.1748 at 198; see also Cornelius Vinj, *Cetshwayo’s Dutchman: Private Journal of a White Trader in Zululand During the British Invasion*, ed. John W. Colenso (London: Greenhill, 1888), 182-84.

the invitation to marry, they did reject the king's prerogative to determine their marriage partners and shook a foundational aspect of Zulu society.

Cetshwayo first tried to mitigate the problem. At the 1876 *umKhosi*, Cetshwayo attempted a compromise by releasing the *ibutho* of men one year younger than the men he had given permission to the year before. The age gap was still substantial. Many of the *iNgcugce* women continued to refuse marriage, some even eloping with their lovers to Natal in an attempt to escape the oppressive measure. In the face of this continued disobedience, Cetshwayo took action: He ordered that women of the *iNgcugce ibutho* who were found unmarried should be killed and that the bodies of fleeing lovers should be placed across the road to warn other would-be elopers. There is no direct account of Cetshwayo's order, and the number of people who died in 1876 is in contention. While Laband holds that Cetshwayo's orders resulted in the deaths of "hundreds," his statement likely relies on the suspect testimony of Governor and High Commander Sir Bartle Frere.<sup>305</sup> As a social evolutionist, Frere vehemently believed in the possibility of a "black conspiracy" of African states that would block the success of a confederation of white states in South Africa.<sup>306</sup> Frere demonized Cetshwayo in his reports to London, in the hope of garnering British support for the invasion and annexation of *kwaZulu*.<sup>307</sup> On the "unparalleled acts of barbarity" of the *iNgcugce* marriages, Frere lamented "the massacre of many hundreds of Zulu girls and their relations, of which the sickening details will be found in the Parliamentary Blue Book of April 1877 [C. 1748] pg. 199-

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<sup>305</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 175-76.

<sup>306</sup> For more information on Frere and the Anglo-Zulu War, see Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879-1884* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 1994), 48. See also Damian P. O'Connor, *The Zulu and the Raj: The Life of Sir Bartle Frere* (Manhattan: Able Publishing, 2002).

<sup>307</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 175.



216.”<sup>308</sup> However, on further inspection of the Blue Book, testimony does not indicate that the number of people killed was actually as high as Frere would suggest. Melmoth Osborn, the resident magistrate, notes that “several girls were killed,” and government messengers note that some cattle were taken from families as fines, but that for the most part, “the land was quiet.”<sup>309</sup> If there had been many hundreds of girls killed, it seems very unlikely that the land would be quiet. In the most specific report, Cetshwayo’s own household servant, Mnukwa, suggests that the primary punishment was a large fine of cattle and that the number of women killed was close to five or six.<sup>310</sup> This testimony is supported by Bishop Colenso’s discussion with informants in kwaZulu a year later and by Cetshwayo’s own testimony in 1881.<sup>311</sup> It is clear that particular women fell victim to Cetshwayo’s ruling on marriage and his efforts to uphold his authority in response to resistance; however, the numbers have been extremely exaggerated, and these women were working within the network or help of their lovers and family members.

There were particular political actors who might have profited from using this instance of violence against women as a chance to better their own political position. Insubordinate Zulu *amakhosi*, like Hamu and Zibhebhu, stood to gain from the rumor that Cetshwayo had murdered hundreds of women in what Frere and others assumed to be an arbitrary act of despotism. One of Colenso’s informants even suggests that these chiefs were responsible for killing the women in an attempt to blacken Cetshwayo’s reputation.<sup>312</sup> By popularizing stories like this, which portrayed their rival poorly, they

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<sup>308</sup> Vinj, *Cetshwayo’s Dutchman*, 187.

<sup>309</sup> BPP, Correspondence respecting the war between the Transvaal Republic and neighbouring native tribes, 1877, C.1748, at 197-8.

<sup>310</sup> Mnukwa speaking to H. Bulwar in Vinj, *Cetshwayo’s Dutchman*, 187.

<sup>311</sup> Colenso in discussion with Magma Fuze Vinj, *Cetshwayo’s Dutchman*, 187; Wright and Webb, *A Zulu King Speaks*, 80-1.

<sup>312</sup> Vinj, *Cetshwayo’s Dutchman*, 187.

might be able to gain favor from the British in the event of an invasion.<sup>313</sup> Their aims overlapped with Frere's expressed concern about the "grinding despotism" of a king reconstructing the "brutalizing system of Chaka."<sup>314</sup> These interpretations are complicated by the testimony of Ndukwana, who held that the marriage was a pretext for Cetshwayo to neutralize one of his father's female *ibutho*.<sup>315</sup> In all of these cases, it is not the women themselves who are of concern, but larger political enterprises. The women are not important as individuals. Rather, Cetshwayo's treatment of women (or his rumored treatment of them) provided a particular offense that might justify the positions of his adversaries.

### **Christian Missions in kwaZulu and Frere's Ultimatum**

Frere was not the first, nor unfortunately the last, to use violence against women as part of the rationalization for intervention into another society. Missionary publications and documents that were produced prior to (and indeed after) annexation portray colonial/European ideas and activities as liberation for an oppressed female population. However, proselytizing Christian missionaries often passed hasty and uninformed judgments on indigenous peoples that profoundly impacted Zulu society in ways that the missionaries were scarcely equipped to understand. The missionaries' presence was the first contact point with white people for many of the Zulu and deeply affected the ways in which black African people understood themselves and their

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<sup>313</sup> This tactic did indeed end up being effective for some of the chiefs, particularly Zibhebhu, who would defect to the British in 1879 during the Anglo-Zulu War and be gifted with a considerable amount of territory.

<sup>314</sup> BPP, Further Correspondence respecting the affairs of South Africa, 1879, C.2252 at 46-52.

<sup>315</sup> JSA, 4:350. Hanretta also notes this information in his work, but fails to raise other testimony. Hanretta, "Women, Marginality," 408.

relation to external colonial powers.<sup>316</sup> In kwaZulu, the Norwegian Missionary Society presence began in 1843 with the Reverend Hanz Schreuder. Schreuder played a prominent role throughout the 1860s and 1870s in mediating disputes between the British colonial administration and the Zulu kings. Allowed into kwaZulu in 1850 by Mpande (most likely for the benefits of possible trade), the mission grew in size and its membership in number throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Although frequently hostile toward intrusion by these harbingers of European hegemony, Cetshwayo recognized the utility of missionaries as moderators and messengers to the colonial government. He maintained an uneasy relationship with Schreuder, who did his best to avoid the Anglo-Zulu War in 1878 and to end it in 1879.

Edward Andrews has suggested that, while initially viewing themselves as virtuous exemplars of religious piety in an unruly and savage world, by the close of colonialism missionaries had become "ideological shock troops for colonial invasion whose zealotry blinded them."<sup>317</sup> Clergy members in KwaZulu, following a mission to spread their faith, offered a moral alibi for colonialist intervention while simultaneously eroding and undermining established Zulu values.<sup>318</sup> Well-meaning theologians, hoping to wipe out the ignorance and backwardness that they believed were intrinsic to native beliefs, campaigned against the perceived superstition and magic often related to women's power.<sup>319</sup> Black African women found themselves presented with a religious

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<sup>316</sup> Greg Cuthbertson, "Christianity, Imperialism and Colonial Warfare," in *A History of Christianity in South Africa*, ed. J. Hofmeyr and Gerald Pillay (Pretoria: HAUM Educational Publishers, 1994), 167.

<sup>317</sup> Edward Andrews, "Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered: A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766–1816," *Journal of Church & State* 51, no. 4 (2010): 663–91.

<sup>318</sup> Mokgethi Motlhabi, *African Theology/Black Theology in South Africa: Looking Back, Moving On*, (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009).

<sup>319</sup> W. G. Mills, "Missionaries, Xhosa Clergy and Suppression of Custom," in *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, ed. H. Bredekamp and R. Ross (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 153–71.

value system that also subordinated women, although in very different ways than they had previously experienced.

Importantly, implications of Christian churches were not solely oppressive; they also opened doors to women's access to power through alternative channels. Agents of Christian churches, most obviously the Colenso family, who remained Cetshwayo's strongest supporters after his exile, specifically allied themselves with the Zulu royal family and benefitted the elite women associated with it. Women and other marginalized groups with less access to traditional Zulu power also could resist domination by using Christian logic systems. The most obvious example of this is early Zulu literature that exhibits the blending and synchronicity of Zulu and Western themes to create an entirely new paradigm for approaching issues.<sup>320</sup> However, this possibility for agency must be tempered by the fact that there still existed a framework of marginalization within these British churches. African women were not educated as readily as their male counterparts, due in part to existing gender paradigms within colonizing culture. Women were able to gain new legitimacy through Western ideology, which privileged them in different ways than Zulu ideology, even as Christianity was being used to confirm invasion of *kwaZulu* and continued marginalization.

Bathonyile, Monase's daughter and Mbuyazi's full sister, offers a possible case study for ways in which Zulu elite women may have attempted to use missionary intervention to their own benefit. In interactions with the women at Mpande's house, it

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<sup>320</sup> Scheub discusses two veins of Zulu literary tradition, one stemming from Christian works and the other dedicated to media and newspapers. See Harold Schedub, "Zulu Oral Tradition and Literature," in *Literature in African Language: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*, ed. B. W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, and W. Tyloch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 493-520.

seems that the missionaries found an attentive audience in the royal women.<sup>321</sup> During his 1854 visit to Monase, the Reverend Schreuder describes her “as usual, friendly, interrogative, and pretty begging.”<sup>322</sup> In particular, he mentions two of her daughters, Bathoyile and Nokwenda, who came to speak with him daily.<sup>323</sup> Another missionary, Whetlergreen, said in 1868 of the two princesses:

“The name of Batonjile, the King's daughter, will be one of the best known from here. I suppose she will be on the list of those referred to in his time by the Right Reverend the Bishop Colenso as the first in the royal family to lend a more open ear to the Word of God than usual. Almost always she has shown me her interest in speaking of God's Word although this wish often has been rather subdued. For a long time she has declared she no longer believes in amathlozi....”<sup>324</sup>

Bathonyile may have truly believed the words of the missionaries who spoke to her, but there is no denying that in them she also had the opportunity for material gain and potential asylum.<sup>325</sup> In 1870, she also would turn to the mission for the possibility of an escape. In a letter to Shepstone, Bishop Jean Francois Allard reports that Bathonyile wished “to come and live on the station.... She would no longer pay heed to the king. It is fear of the Prince (Cetshwayo) that binds her.”<sup>326</sup> It is likely that Bathonyile’s relationship as sister to Mbuyazi placed her in a position of potential hazard in 1870, as her father’s protection seemed near its end. Here it seems that she may have been

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<sup>321</sup> Shamase has written a fascinating, but underappreciated, study of these interactions in his 1999 thesis. In this work, Shamase briefly covers the Norwegian Mission’s relations with many royal women, including Mpande’s mother, Songiya. See Shamase, ““Reign of King Mpande,”” 195-220.

<sup>322</sup> Schreuder describes the women “begging” for the gifts he might bring. C.O. 481380, P.RO: Shepstone to Scoll 8 December 1856. encl. in Grey to Labouchere. D.4.

16 January 1857, quoted in Shamase, “Reign of King Mpande,” 208.

<sup>323</sup> Shepstone to Scoll, 8 December 1856. Encl. in Grey to Labouchere. D.4.

16 January 1857, quoted in Shamase, “Reign of King Mpande,” 208.

<sup>324</sup> Quoted in Michael Whisson and Martin West, ed. *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa: Anthropological Essays in Honour of Monica Wilson* (London: Rex Collings Ltd, 1975), 170-77.

<sup>325</sup> In 1868, when Bathonyile received a package from a Swedish philanthropist and countess. This offers a standout example, but missionaries regularly brought goods to their congregations. Frederick Hale, ed., *Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand: Selected Correspondence 1844-1900* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1997), 55.

<sup>326</sup> Allard to Shepstone, July 30<sup>th</sup> 1869, quoted in Shamase, “Reign of King Mpande,” 213.

exploring the possibility of using the missionaries as a refuge from her brother Cetshwayo, just as her mother, Monase, and several of her brothers were doing at Bishop Colenso's mission.

Soon after her expressed desire for asylum, however, she was married to a chief of the amaMthwethwa and moved away.<sup>327</sup> In 1874, when the Reverend Ommund Oftebro visited her, he found her changed. He expressed concern that she had been called by the *amadlozi* (ancestral spirits) to "be their instrument" as an *isangoma* (diviner inspired by ancestral spirits).<sup>328</sup> Perhaps Bathonyile felt that the missionaries had failed her. She may then have responded by turning to other forms of spirituality to express herself, particularly as Cetshwayo's relations with the missionaries deteriorated. Exactly what Bathonyile's story means, and the further details of other Zulu women's relationship with the missionaries, requires more research. However, the existence of this kind of interaction does suggest that Bathonyile, and perhaps other women, were actively searching for ways to escape Cetshwayo and using the Christian missions to achieve this purpose, and the colonial sovereignty for safety – like Mawa. The missions clearly seem to have represented a refuge and acted as such for Monase and her sons, though apparently they were out of reach for Bathonyile.

### **Frere's Ultimatum**

The British colonial officials considered themselves to be compassionate towards Zulu women's needs. Considering the number of Zulu people in general, and particularly women who sought refuge inside the borders of Natal, it seems reasonable

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<sup>327</sup> Shamase, "Reign of King Mpande," 213.

<sup>328</sup> Hale, *Norwegian Missionaries*, 55.

to argue that an expansion of British control might offer a better life for women still within the Zulu territory. In Frere's 1878 ultimatum, which would ultimately result in the Anglo-Zulu War, he referred specifically to the return of Mehlokazulu and his brother, who had violently killed two *amakhosikazi*.<sup>329</sup> The men had entered into Natal borders in order to remove and kill two women who had cuckolded their father, Sihayo, *inkhosi* of the amaQungebe and one of Cetshwayo's favorites.<sup>330</sup> Colonist outrage for the atrocity demanded that the brothers be extradited to Natal and tried for their crimes. Although on the one hand this may represent colonist and paternalistic concern for the *amakhosikazi* in question, it also was likely heavily influenced by settler concern about border control.<sup>331</sup> Frere certainly capitalized on this most recent outrage to strengthen his validation for producing the ultimatum.

What is potentially interesting about this case is that it serves to demonstrate some of the differences between concepts of masculinity in the colony and *kwaZulu*. Mehlokazulu set out originally to uphold his father's dignity, after two of his wives had become impregnated and escaped with their lovers to Natal.<sup>332</sup> One of the wives had been accused of bewitching Sihayo and using her divine powers to escape her husband.<sup>333</sup> In this instance, the existence of supernatural powers could contribute to an attempt to blacken the name of the offending *inkhosikazi*, and it also may signify recognition of her ability to disgrace her husband, along with his vulnerability in this instance. The son's actions can be read as an attempt to restore the masculinity of his

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<sup>329</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 192.

<sup>330</sup> In July of 1878, they entered into the Umsinga District of Natal with a large following, apprehended one of the wives, and returned later in the evening to take away the next. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 192.

<sup>331</sup> See *Times of Natal*, 18 September 1878.

<sup>332</sup> Vinj, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, 16-18.

<sup>333</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 192.

father after this woman, who had the power to dishonor him with the help of supernatural means, stripped him of pride and of an important and essential element of his masculinity.

One potential reason for the intensity of the young men's response was the amount of vulnerability that the royal men experienced in allowing these women into their homes. As has been discussed earlier with relation to succession, women could be considered potential threats in the lives of the powerful *amakhosi*. Just as Cetshwayo considered it necessary to violently and decisively kill his own people in order to demonstrate and maintain his authority over civilians, it may have been that the men may have felt it necessary to demonstrate authority over women in order to re-impress on their wives the hierarchy of gender.<sup>334</sup> Women in this time could be and were still involved with clan politics and, especially because of their access to men's food, could be deadly if they were not trustworthy.<sup>335</sup> Both women were ultimately killed, but they defied their proscribed roles and demonstrated one way that women's power could be understood in Zulu culture through supernatural prowess.

In inserting themselves into this situation, British colonial officials also were intervening in the gender relationships within kwaZulu, supposedly on behalf of the women. By demanding a trial, they could be seen as defending these women who had cuckolded Sihayo, therefore participating in emasculating the Zulu male and asserting their own dominance of ideology.<sup>336</sup> T. J. Tallie, a scholar approaching Zulu colonization from a gendered perspective, has stated, "By marking indigenous practices

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<sup>334</sup> Cetshwayo noted on multiple occasions that killing was necessary to maintain authority. Webb and Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks*, 19.

<sup>335</sup> Here a note about that time when Cetshwayo used *isigodhlo* girls to kill a rival by poisoning his food. JSA, 3:43-6.

<sup>336</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 193.



as aberrant and in need of reform, Natal's settlers could claim a paternalistic role of caretaking over native peoples, recast and reaffirm their own sexual and social practices, and justify the processes of land and labor alienation that the settlement project entailed."<sup>337</sup> Frere's ultimatum does not encompass the ways in which British intervention into Zulu affairs may have altered gender dynamics, but it does raise questions about the complex space of agency opened through British colonization and indicates that the *amakhosikazi* were sensitive to opportunities for escaping their roles within their own societies.

In this particular instance, the *inkhosi* at Ulundi did not turn in Mehlokulu, assuming that "the Whites would here only be acting in their usual fashion, and...when these had been given up they would again demand others."<sup>338</sup> This response from Cetshwayo's *amakhosi* also ignores the fate of the women. It focuses on the political implications of a power struggle between the two opposing governments, although the women represented a point of contact. Faced with an ultimatum that essentially meant either submission or war, Cetshwayo and his advisors chose to stand against imperial troops and the thousands of African peoples who fought with them in 1879. The part that Zulu royal women played in the Anglo-Zulu war is not entirely clear, particularly because the evidence from this period comes largely from colonial military documents, in which women would be largely excluded as non-combatants. There is evidence that some women in Cetshwayo's *isigodhlo* were trained in handling guns and would follow him on his visits to various *amakhanda*, so there is a possibility that they could have

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<sup>337</sup> Tallie, "Queering Natal," 170.

<sup>338</sup> Vinj, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, 17.

participated in the fighting.<sup>339</sup> However, they do not seem to have ever actually seen battle.<sup>340</sup> Even had they not directly participated, the royal women surely felt the push and pull of war. In particular, the elite women of the *isigodhlo* would have seen the absolute destruction of Ondini, Cetshwayo's stronghold in the resulting struggle. As a result the Zulu royal household would be irrevocably fractured, particularly during this final battle, which dispersed the *amakhosikazi* of the Zulu household.

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<sup>339</sup> John Dunn gave carbines to several of the older girls in the *isigodhlo* and instructed them in musketry. They would practice regularly and accompanied Cetshwayo on his visits to various *amakhanda*. JSA, 3:328; Heinrich Filter and S. Bourquin, trans and ed., *Paulina Dlamini: Servant of Two Kings 1893-1969* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1986), 54.

<sup>340</sup> JSA, 3:328.

## Part 6: Anglo-Zulu War to Cetshwayo's Death (1879-1884)

### *Historical Overview*

The Anglo-Zulu War, so popularized in the 1964 film *Zulu*, was hardly an entertaining affair for the Zulu royal family.<sup>341</sup> The territory previously under their control was divided into thirteen “kinglets” decided by the Wolseley settlement, the details of which were left to the discretion of the recently appointed lieutenant governor, General Sir Garnet Wolseley. In creating the divisions, the primary aim of the British officials was to ensure a large number of feeble Zulu states at no expense to the Empire and posing no threat to the nearby colony of Natal or to the Transvaal. To this end, friendly (or at least less hostile) *inkhosi* were allocated larger portions of Zulu territory, based on their record of cooperation. Among these was John Dunn, the white trader who had helped Mbuyazi confront Cetshwayo at the battle of Nondasuko and who later served as an advisor to Cetshwayo. Exhibiting his chameleon-like allegiance once again, Dunn was given the largest portion of KwaZulu, an area to the south intended to serve as a buffer zone between the newly divided kingdom and Natal. Far from resulting in a peaceful settlement, this fairly arbitrary partition of land resulted in sustained conflict among various chiefs over who could control what, and why. This conflict would essentially polarize into two factions: the royalist uSuthu who supported Cetshwayo and his line, pitted largely against Zibhebhu and his Mandlakazi supporters.<sup>342</sup> From the perspective of Sir Melmoth Osborn, who was to be the main channel of communication between the Zulu chiefs and the British government,

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<sup>341</sup> *Zulu*, directed by Cy Endfield (London: Paramount Pictures, 1963).

<sup>342</sup> It is worth noting that in the dialogue between colonial administrators these two factions are discussed in fairly concrete terms, as though the two groups were preformed and absolute, but the support for either side does not reflect ethnic divisions so much as it does political preference and allegiance.

Cetshwayo's royalist supporters were the primary of unrest and the greater threat to the British colony. Thus Osborn turned a deaf ear to complaints by the uSuthu, allowing Zibhebhu's supporters to oppress and ravage those who opposed this pretender to the throne.

By the 1880s, changes to African social systems that had been in place in the Natal colony were becoming visible in the social dynamics throughout the Thukela River Basin. Hut taxes imposed on heads of *imizi* forced families to send off their sons to become laborers in order to earn capital, and the dynamics of the family unit began to change. In the 1880s, these taxes did not apply over the whole of KwaZulu. Regional chiefs had been given the chance to rule for themselves, assuming that they remained on good terms with the Natal colony to the south. However, the arbitrary partition of land makes it absolutely clear that white authorities had usurped the political structure of the Zulu kingdom. They were the ultimate authority in determining the boundary lines of the political chiefdoms, which were repeatedly redrawn, forcing chiefs to reconsider their allegiances and contributing to unrest and uncertainty.<sup>343</sup> The British also were able to use boundary lines as a way to curry favor, giving the biggest and best territory to compliant Zulu *amakhosi*, commoners, and (perhaps most insultingly) white men, like John Dunn. Importantly for this study, these boundary lines not only disregarded the complex territorial control and authority that already existed, but the land partitions took absolutely no account of the powerful *amakhosikazi* who may have resided in the great *amakhanda*. There was chaos throughout, but Zulu women in the royal family specifically experienced displacement, separation, hunger, and marginalization. If they

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<sup>343</sup> Zibhebhu, for example, despite being one of the colonial administrators' best-loved *inkhosi*, saw his territory redrawn five times from 1879 to 1890. Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars*, 19.

had married into different families, these women may have found themselves separated from their traditional homes and the support and protection of their fathers and brothers. In the confusion, they were at times treated as plunder and capital, transferred or held hostage by chiefs appropriating power.<sup>344</sup>

Cetshwayo, meanwhile, had been exiled to the Cape where he, along with Bishop Colenso and other supporters, engaged in a war of words to appeal his case to the high courts of London. Their efforts were eventually successful, and in 1883 the king would be returned to the deteriorating situation in southeastern Africa. His reception would not be a pleasant experience, unfortunately. Despite the best efforts of his champions working towards a fair settlement, administrators in Natal were already antagonistic towards Cetshwayo and his uSuthu supporters. Their concern about a renewed attack by the banished king served to sour the victory earned in London. Cetshwayo returned to oversee all but one of the kinglets, namely Zibhebhu, while the two southernmost regions were consolidated into the Reserve territory maintained as a buffer zone and refuge for those opposed to the restored king. This was far from a peaceful arrangement, and Cetshwayo and Zibhebhu soon met on the battlefield. Cetshwayo and his uSuthu first invaded Zibhebhu's territory, but were ambushed and crushingly defeated. Zibhebhu counterattacked on July 21, 1883, once again destroying Unidini and the uSuthu leadership. Cetshwayo was never to return. He died in February of 1884 after his escape to the Reserve territory, leaving the legacy of kingdom to a young Dinuzulu and the kingdom to an uncertain future.

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<sup>344</sup> Zibhebhu, for example, held 17 of Cetshwayo's wives and six of his daughters captive after defeating the sovereign in 1884. It was only pressure from Henry Francis Fynn that forced their return. Zibhebhu insisted on keeping the rest of the women in his *umuzi*.

### ***Amakhosikazi in Cetshwayo's Absence***

Five years earlier, on September 15, 1879, Cetshwayo boarded a ship as a prisoner of war, exiled to the Cape. He was accompanied by two of his advisors as well as four unidentified women during his time away from his home. Laband calls them “four young women of the royal household, every one of them the daughter of a great chief,” but gives no further explanation of who they were.<sup>345</sup> Laband helpfully notes the women’s connection to other great chiefs. Perhaps the daughters were sent along to serve as companions to Cetshwayo, but also were potentially physical embodiments of support during his banishment from the *amakhosi*, who were unwilling or unable to accompany their *inkhosi enkulu* themselves. In some sources, the women are referred to as Cetshwayo’s wives, but in other instances they are very clearly denoted as simply his *umndlunkulu*.<sup>346</sup> What is notable is the level of erasure that this indicates in regard to the women in Zulu history. Despite the existence of a picture of these women, and the fact that they accompanied the king in exile all the way to London, their names are not considered important and therefore are not included.<sup>347</sup> Perhaps British officials made the assumption that this “savage” king, with his hundred of wives, could not have emotional or personal connections with the women in his household. Perhaps because the balance of power was so overtly in this man’s favor, the officials felt that they too could ignore the women. It also may be that the exclusion of the women’s names is more a reflection on the Victorian English patriarchal society. Perhaps it is all three.

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<sup>345</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 344.

<sup>346</sup> Colenso wrote that Cetshwayo was accompanied by “two men and four girls, none of his wives.” While in a special report pamphlet written for the *Cape Times* Richard Murray wrote, “four young women of the royal household every one of them the daughter of a great chief,” while the picture accessed by John Laband referred to the women as “wives.” Vinj, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, xiv; Special Reporter of the *Cape Times* [Richard William Murray], *Cetywayo, from the Battle of Ulundi to the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: Murry & St. Leger, 1879), 13 in Laband, *Rise and Fall*, image 47.

<sup>347</sup> See fig. 2, an image of the four accompanying women on the ship to the Cape Town.

What is fairly clear is that these women were not any of his principal queens. Perhaps they were in fact his royal handmaidens, or *umndlunkulu*. Cetshwayo's relationship with the non-elite *umndlunkulu* was a source of gossip in the *isigodhlo*. There is evidence to suggest that Cetshwayo held the *umndlunkulu* in a privileged position of trust. As was noted before, they were trained in the use of carbines and acted as his bodyguards. Cetshwayo also employed them as assassins on at least one occasion, in which two *umndlunkulu* were designated to poison Masiphula, one of Mpande's advisors.<sup>348</sup> These women prepared the food for Cetshwayo and the other elite men of the royal household on a daily basis. Therefore, they needed to be trustworthy and might have been able to improve their condition in the world by the use of that trust and proximity to power. An enlightening book by Paulina Dlamini, who was an *umndlunkulu* in Cetshwayo's household until the 1879 war, provides an insider's view of life behind the walls. The men and women who attended Cetshwayo could be rewarded, often by the offer of generous amounts of food, but they also were vulnerable to his retribution.<sup>349</sup> Dlamini and other *umndlunkulu* were frequently playful and sometimes would peep in through the latticework to surreptitiously spy on the unsuspecting king while he was bathing.<sup>350</sup> The king had favorites and allowed only women from a particular family to prepare his food, indicating the level of trust and vulnerability that he felt. This suggests that some women got preferential treatment.<sup>351</sup> There even were rumors that Cetshwayo preferred his *umndlunkulu* (who also acted as

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<sup>348</sup> Mpande's advisors (masiphula), see JSA, 4:127. Filter, *Two Kings*, 60-2.

<sup>349</sup> JSA, 3:328.

<sup>350</sup> Filter, *Two Kings*, 54; JSA, 3:43-46.

<sup>351</sup> Especially trusted the women from Manyamana's Buthulezi. Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 175.

his concubines) to his actual wives.<sup>352</sup> One reading of this suggests that it was because he needed to be less concerned about the political ramifications of impregnating the women of a lower social ranking. Although these girls may have been the daughters of powerful men, they did not rank so highly that he might actually pay *ilobola* for them; therefore, they had less control over the king. The effects of his favoritism for the lower ranks in his *isigodhlo* are not clear, but his special regard may have served to reduce the authority of the *amakhosikazi*, who were of a loftier status, by undermining their importance. However, it also may have been that the rules governing his relationships with his true wives were simply very different, and the way he interacted with other women may not have affected the general social order.

Considering the complexity that must have existed within a household of several hundred people, it is interesting that the British officials, so concerned with documentation and clerical record keeping, neither mention the womens' social hierarchy nor attempt to untangle the complex relations that Cetshwayo had with them. Perhaps the officials assumed that, in a household of so many women, Cetshwayo could not care for them, that they were strictly a commodity or lowly concubines. It also may be that the officials simply felt uncomfortable breaching the clear gender divides that made the *isigodhlo* a sacred space. However, Cetshwayo was certain to have favorites, and within the locus of Zulu society the ensuing drama had resounding effects. Perhaps the assumption that Cetshwayo did not care for his family, his home, or the women in it is a reflection of the Victorian people who did the recording. At that time, the idealized middle-class father was an absent but generous provider. In that time of absent fathers

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<sup>352</sup> JSA, 4:338.



and isolated bureaucrats, such assumptions about Zulu society may provide more insight into the recording culture than they do the recorded.<sup>353</sup>

Regardless of what British officials may have assumed, Cetshwayo did care for his family and was acutely concerned about the condition of his son and heir, Dinuzulu. After Cetshwayo was exiled, Harriette Colenso and others of his white benefactors would note his concern and desire to know about his family.<sup>354</sup> After the 1879 destruction of Undini (Cetshwayo's great *amakhandu*), at Cetshwayo's suggestion the women walked north with his children and hundreds of cattle. They would find themselves under the watchful and antagonizing supervision of Zibhebhu. Among them was the heir, Dinuzulu, born to Queen Nomvimbi (aka Okaka Msweli) in 1868.<sup>355</sup>

Nomvimbi was originally an *umndlunkulu* of Mbuyazi's house, captured by Cetshwayo in 1856 at the battle of Nondakusuka.<sup>356</sup> Cetshwayo famously had very few sons, several of whom died in infancy.<sup>357</sup> Perhaps this is the reason Nomvimbi, who was of a lesser house in the *isigodhlo*, was allowed to be the privileged mother to a Zulu king.<sup>358</sup> Several of James Stuart's informants maintained that Nomvimbi was impregnated "while she was still an unmarried maiden," raising questions about the legitimacy of Dinuzulu's birth.<sup>359</sup> Other sources hold that he was in fact legitimate and

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<sup>353</sup> For more on fatherhood and masculinity, see John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 93.

<sup>354</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 345. See also

<sup>355</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 1.

<sup>356</sup> JSA, 1:199, 32.

<sup>357</sup> Mkebeni kaDabulumanzi, nephew to Cetshwayo, recalls a dream Cetshwayo had in which two former *inKosi* and "a chief's wife" tell him that, because the sons of the house of Shaka are given to killing each other, only one or his three young sons would survive to adulthood. In this story, Mkebeni notes, "We have forgotten the name of the woman." It is possible that Mkebeni, telling the story in 1921, had not been told the woman's name, or perhaps that by the time he was telling the story, her role seemed cursory and not worthy of inclusion. JSA, 3:200-2.

<sup>358</sup> Guy refers to her as a "commoner." Guy, *The View Across the River*, 82-84.

<sup>359</sup> JSA, 1:32, 199; JSA, 4:191, 293.

that Cetshwayo was justified in allowing Dinuzulu to be his heir.<sup>360</sup> After Cetshwayo's death, Dinuzulu would be involved in an extended competition for control of the Zulu populace, and it may have been that, in this dispute, rumors regarding his legitimacy were circulated to undermine his claims. Whether or not Nomvimbi was of common stock provides an interesting possibility that Cetshwayo was able to bypass the norms that might separate being an *amakhosikazi* from most normal Zulu women.

Nomvimbi had strong influence over her son's formative years and would advise him regularly even later in life. His *isibongo* refers to her strong influence over him:

Mamba ernnyama ka Jininindi

Ithole lakoka Msweli Elanyisa liguqile

[The black mamba of Cetshwayo

The calf of oka Msweli that sucks kneeling down] <sup>361</sup>

In conversations with Princess Constance Magogo, Dinuzulu's daughter, she made clear that her grandmother had a strong presence in her father's life.<sup>362</sup> It was Nomvimbi's brother Ndabuko who would serve as co-regent to the young prince when he became ruler at the age of fifteen. Ndabuko would publically speak with the British authorities and be recognized by them, but Nomvimbi was still present in the background. Years later, when Dinuzulu went into exile following the Bambatha rebellion, it was his mother who would serve as regent for her son and to whom he wrote regularly about

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<sup>360</sup> JSA, 1:199.

<sup>361</sup> The image of a calf sucking "kneeling down" suggests a continued dependency on his mother. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 3; Edward Muntu Masina, "Zulu Perceptions and Reactions to British Occupation of Land in Natal Colony and Zululand, 1850-1887: A Recapitulation Based on Oral and Written Sources," (PhD thesis, University of Zululand 2006), 286.

<sup>362</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 1-5.

affairs in the kingdom.<sup>363</sup> Even if she was not officially recognized by the British colonial authorities as an important figure or included in the major historical books that have been written, Nomvimbi was an obvious authority over her son. Although she may not have taken a major role in leading a battle or in negotiations, Nomvimbi would have been the one who saw Dinuzulu on a regular basis when he was growing up and while his father was in exile. She later advised and ruled for her son as well, after he had been banished.

Although Cetshwayo had very few children, his household was enormous, and the web of relationships consequently was complicated. As one might expect in envisioning a household with hundreds of people, the interweaving power relationships were complex and shifting. The women's experiences and roles in this space deserve further examination in an effort to determine more precisely what occurred, but general tendencies can be extrapolated. As has been indicated above, the women in the *isigodhlo* had complex relationships with their chief. These relationships can be described through the social concept of a "bargain," wherein *isigodhlo* women compromised their own interests in an asymmetrical gender relationship in order to improve their social standing, status, or access to goods and power.<sup>364</sup> Communal shaming is one recognized tactic that the non-elite women in Zulu society undertook in order to assert influence on their lives. Stuart's informants describe songs that the women would sing to shame their husband into leaving his favorite wife.<sup>365</sup> Through

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<sup>363</sup> During his exile, Dinuzulu wrote to his mother through the doctor at St. Helena. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 151.

<sup>364</sup> For an interesting exploration of the "bargain" concept, see Bina Agarwal, "Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household," *Feminist Economics* 3 no. 1 (1997): 1-51.

<sup>365</sup> "*Isigqumiselo*.... This song is sung by women of the kraal when one of their number receives too much attention from the husband... The man, on hearing such singing by the other women, will tie up his mats, leave his favorite, and go to the other women, i.e. those who are stabbing him with words. He will be unable any longer to eat of the food made by his favorite wife." JSA, 4:39.

rumors, subtle disapproval, and shaming, the women were able to exert control over their husband.

This was no less the case with Cetshwayo's wives.<sup>366</sup> In particular, Nhamule's interaction with Cetshwayo illuminates the dynamics between the *inkhosi* and the *amakhosikazi*. She and her fellow wives felt that Cetshwayo had been favoring one of the wives more than the other *amakhosikazi* of his household. Nhamule led her fellow *amakhosikazi* in refusing a gift of feathers from Cetshwayo, in front of a group of other powerful *amakhosi*.<sup>367</sup> The humiliated king retaliated by threatening to kill his disobedient spouse, but in the end he forgave her and her companions, though he reprimanded them sternly. As a collective, Cetshwayo's wives were able to act to shame their husband in order to get what they wanted, but in order to keep their lives, they also needed to compromise and conform to norms which favored him. Specifically, they needed to accept Cetshwayo's gifts and not embarrass him. This type of social bargain was in effect constantly, but this instance was memorable and makes the women visible because the deal was broken, and Cetshwayo was forced to reassert his authority. Nhamule's actions may have risked her life, but they also demonstrate that even the wives of the most influential man in the Zulu kingdom could influence their household head.

Cetshwayo himself recognized women as being capable of taking powerful positions and roles in Zulu society. In his 1881 commission, he stated:

“Chieftaincy falls to a female provided that female be the mother, grandmother or some very important relation of the king. The lady holds the chieftainship of a certain district for the king.”<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> JSA, 4:90-91.

<sup>367</sup> JSA, 4:90-91.

<sup>368</sup> Webb and Wright, *A King Speaks*, 110.

Here we can see that even the king contended that women could hold positions of power. This would not be the case under the British colonial administration, however, where women were not considered to be eligible for positions within the government. In effect, this would serve to marginalize women's roles under the colonial administration.

What is certain is that the women in Cetshwayo's *isigodhlo* would have had an extremely chaotic experience during the 1880s. After 1879, at least twenty of the women were sent to a hostile environment under Zibhebhu, where some were essentially held hostage while Zibhebhu tried to negotiate larger land holdings and otherwise extend his influence in Cetshwayo's absence.<sup>369</sup> In being passed around like spoils of war, the *amakhosikazi* from the Zulu royal house experienced a dramatic change, from a position of high social status to that of a valuable property to be exchanged. Women certainly had larger roles than simple commodities within their clan's own *isigodhlo*, but outside of this space the rules changed. Caught in the middle of multiple conflicts between the Usuthu and Zibhebhu's Mandlakzi, they were passed around by different regionally dominant *inkhosi*. Additionally, in this period of continued warfare, the whole of Zululand experienced a lack of food, displacement, and general confusion regarding shifting boundary lines. In spite of this, it should be noted that, even with a different head of house, the basic tenets of Zulu societal norms would have been in place for the *amakhosikazi*. The locus of power in a particular *ikhanda* may have been a different ruling clan, but the social norms would have been familiar. Therefore, the treatment Cetshwayo's *amakhosikazi* received at Zibhebhu's house likely

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<sup>369</sup> Zibhebhu kept cattle and *amakhosikazi* to punish Dinuzulu and others who escaped from his control. See Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 3; Filter, *Two Kings*, 71-74; JSA, 3:310.

would have varied in accordance to Zibhebhu's relationship with the women's brothers, uncles, and fathers.

Under his supervision, the Zulu royal family experienced degradation and humiliation. When KwaZulu was partitioned, Zibhebhu already had defected to the British cause. He subsequently was given a large portion of land to the north and set about positioning himself as the new authority in KwaZulu. In his efforts to further his own status, Zibhebhu humiliated Cetshwayo by demanding tribute from the common people, refusing to give up property that was supposed to go to the British government, and displacing any who opposed him.<sup>370</sup> He was said to have taken two of Cetshwayo's daughters as wives, in what might be read as an expression of dominance extending even over the exiled king's children.<sup>371</sup> Dinuzulu was made to perform menial tasks, and Zibhebhu refused to return others from Cetshwayo's *isigodhlo* to nearby uSuthu supporters.<sup>372</sup>

Nomvimbi had been able to escape to her brother Ndabuko, and eventually they were able to sneak the young Dinuzulu to uSuthu supporters, despite Zibhebhu's protest. Unfortunately, Dinuzulu's sister Beyisile was not able to escape.<sup>373</sup> We know from stories that were passed down to Dinuzulu's daughter that the women of the *isigodhlo* acted as protectors and guardians of the young prince during the tumult of overthrow. According to the descriptions in Binns's *Dinuzulu*, "Too many times in the opening of the years of the 1880s he [Dinuzulu] was woken by warning shouts before

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<sup>370</sup> Zibhebhu was appointed as the actual guardian to Dinuzulu by the British and disposed of Cetshwayo's cattle and *isigodhlo* as he liked. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 3; JSA, 3:310.

<sup>371</sup> JSA, 3:310.

<sup>372</sup> See Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 1-5 and Filter, *Two Kings*, 71-74; JSA, 3:310.

<sup>373</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 345.

being bundled away to safety by his father's wives and their attendants."<sup>374</sup> Clearly, there was an organization and a collective understanding of the importance of the young prince. Exactly who bundled away the prince, and what the dynamic between these women was, is an area for further research.

While the women of the royal *isigodhlo* did their best to protect the young heir, Wolseley and his colonial administration deliberately tried to keep the kingdom divided within itself. Wolseley's successor, Melmoth Osborn, based many of his policies on the belief that the uSuthu were the cause of continued unrest, while Zibebhu represented a staunch ally. In accordance, his officials ignored and mocked the complaints of the uSuthu about continuing aggression from Zibebhu. However, Wolseley's settlement failed even on its own terms, and he could neither contain the growing unrest from spilling over into Natal nor stop the fracturing that he had caused in deliberately dividing the land holdings. The situation of the Zulu royal family seemed dire.

### **A Trip to England and Cetshwayo's Less-than-Triumphant Return**

With this deteriorating situation in KwaZulu, Cetshwayo's supporters started a momentous effort to gain supporters in the English-speaking world who might help his return to KwaZulu. Approached by Cetshwayo's uSuthu, Bishop Colenso (who had already been a safe haven for Monase and her children when they were escaping the vengeful Cetshwayo) began to empathize with the plight of the persecuted royalists.<sup>375</sup> Colenso was already highly critical of the British colonial regime and had even ended his close friendship with Theophilus Shepstone due to his distaste for Shepstone's

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<sup>374</sup> Guy, *The View Across the River*, 95.

<sup>375</sup> Guy, *Heretic*, 273-90.

questionable practices.<sup>376</sup> In pursuit of this, Colenso began an ambitious campaign of letters to gain the support of powerful forces in Britain and to expose the tainted practices of the colonial administration in Natal. He was helped considerably by Cetshwayo's charming and regal attitude in their meetings with important officials. Bishop Colenso was able to enlist journalist Lady Florence Dixie, who raised public awareness that helped aid the *inkhosi* in his quest to return home. On July 12, 1882, these efforts would bear fruit when Cetshwayo set sail for London.<sup>377</sup> With the situation obviously continuing to deteriorate in KwaZulu, the British parliament agreed to allow Cetshwayo to return to his kingdom, in the hopes that it would calm the rising tide of turbulence. However, the interceding years had taken a toll on the region, and Cetshwayo returned to a chaotic situation. Even the return of the king would not be enough.

Upon the king's return, KwaZulu again was divided by the British, in an effort to protect the holdings of the Natal colony from potential violence. Cetshwayo would find himself hemmed in by anti-uSuthu officials to the south and his archrival, Zibhebhu, to the north. On his return in January of 1883, the exiled king was taking control over a host of recently deposed *amakhosi*, not all of whom were overjoyed to see their newfound independence so suddenly and capriciously removed. On a popular front, though many still looked to the Zulu royal family, few of his supporters in lands Zibhebhu controlled or in colonial territory were willing to uproot themselves in support

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<sup>376</sup> Bishop Colenso had a close friendship with Theophilus Shepstone until 1873. After the Rebellion of Langalibalele, the religious Colenso came to the conclusion that his friend was using "expediency and force" over "truth and justice." The Bishop would stop speaking with his dear friend and would work tirelessly against his old friend's administration. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*, 88. See also Jeff Guy, *Heretic*, 209-13.

<sup>377</sup> See fig. 3, the portrait of Cetshwayo in British attire in London 1882.



of their ruler.<sup>378</sup> Common people under Zulu influence had practiced fairly fluid allegiances to ruling families up to this point. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that regular Africans would prefer to bow to a new power instead of upending their lives in solidarity with a distant king. As a result, Cetshwayo's support base continued to shrink as Zibhebhu and the British colonials in the Reserve Territory to the south insisted that their citizens either swear allegiance or leave the territory. Taking action in March of 1883, the uSuthu attempted an attack on Zibhebhu. Unfortunately, they were quickly taken in a decisive victory, and Cetshwayo found himself depressingly discredited. Quickly afterwards, Undini was again attacked, and Cetshwayo was again exiled, this time not by an invading force, but by another *inkhosi*. Jeff Guy has marked this moment, when many of the great men of the Zulu royal house were hunted down and slaughtered, as the end of the old Zulu order.<sup>379</sup>

In this disheartening situation, Zibhebhu again captured women from Cetshwayo's *isigodhlo*. They were held once more as hostages, and it was only the pleading of Henry Francis Fynn, a British official, that forced Zibhebhu to return seventeen of Cetshwayo's wives, along with six of his daughters.<sup>380</sup> The rest of the *isigodhlo* was distributed as booty amongst Zibhebhu's men.<sup>381</sup> Cetshwayo also repeated himself, once more departing for new land with four unnamed Zulu women. This time he headed to the British-controlled reserve as a safe haven, but instead was subjected to a penal deportation. The women of his family, no longer protected by the social location of *amakhosikazi* in the dominant clan that had finally fallen, were extremely vulnerable

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<sup>378</sup> JSA, 3:309.

<sup>379</sup> Guy, *Zulu Kingdom*, 204.

<sup>380</sup> JSA, 3:310.

<sup>381</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 364.

to other powers in the Thukela Basin. Those women of his *isigodhlo* who did not get removed to the reserve were displaced to caves, where they were forced to remain, hungry, for over a year.<sup>382</sup> The last fully recognized Zulu king, Cetshwayo kaMpande, died February 8, 1884, under the supervision of British Resident in KwaZulu, Osborn. The death of the *inkhosi* left the Zulu clan leaderless once again, in chaotic disarray.<sup>383</sup>

The women of the Zulu royal household again become visible in the immediate aftermath of Cetshwayo's death in the Reserve area. Members of Cetshwayo's household insisted on removing his body to their homeland. Osborn, concerned about their procession through disputed areas, refused to allow the funeral to proceed. Despite the visitations by male *inkhosi*, the stubborn Osborn held his ground. However, the collective action of Cetshwayo's wives changed this. According to Binns:

“The widows of Cetshwayo, angered beyond endurance at the protracted delay in the funeral arrangements of their royal master, took the law into their own hands. On the afternoon of 8 April they set out and made their way in a body to the man who was responsible for their disappointments. Sweeping every obstacle aside they thronged into the Residency demanding the late king's immediate burial. So excited were they, and so violent did they become that Osborn had to beat an ignominious retreat leaving them in full possession of the building.... A few hours later official sanction was granted for the removal of the remains to the kraal of Dabulamanzi”<sup>384</sup>

The official summary put forward by Osborn himself would read: “The Resident Commissioner found it necessary to give his consent to the removal of the remains to a kraal.”<sup>385</sup> The truncated nature of Osborn's dispatch indicates the degree to which women's actions, even when overt and violent, are made fugitive in the official

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<sup>382</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 364.

<sup>383</sup> See Guy, *The View Across the River*, 82-4; Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 367.

<sup>384</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 14-15.

<sup>385</sup> BPP, Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Zululand and Adjacent Territories, 1884, C.4037, at 100-101.

writings. The *amakhosikazi* displayed a clear ability to organize and to act in achieving their own ends. Although the leadership of the group and some of the greater complexities are missing from the details available, it is still obvious that the women were able to act independently. Binns summarizes: “A handful of determined women had succeeded in a task which the combined efforts of the royal brothers had failed to accomplish.”<sup>386</sup> This incident goes completely ignored in the conventional texts on Zulu history. The *amakhosikazi* are forgotten, even though they represented the impetus for action and were capable (unlike their brothers and uncles) of making a British official run in fear. It is likely that their actions were heavily circumstantial. This kind of mass defiance did not occur frequently, but the fact that it did and that it is so little mentioned in the official documentation raises questions about what other kinds of incidents also may have gone unmentioned in official reports.

### **Dinuzulu’s Corronation and Eventual Annexation**

After Cetshwayo’s death, Dinuzulu was left vulnerable to continuing attacks from Zibhebhu’s supporters and to the antagonism of the British in general and Osborn in particular. Turning in desperation to the Boers for military support, the uSuthu were able to crushingly defeat Zibhebhu in June of 1885 and drive the hostile *inkhosi* to the reserve territory. This support came at a steep price. Dinuzulu was made to cede two-thirds of his holdings to his Boer allies, including much of his best grazing land. The new area – fleetingly the Boer New Republic in 1886–was absorbed into the South African Republic two years later under the same government that annexed KwaZulu

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<sup>386</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 14-15.

into the Empire in 1887. Some of the Zulu royal family's staunchest supporters were in this territory, notably the abaQulusi, who had been the royal family's most reliable allies since Mnkabayi had overseen the territory in the 1820s. Overnight, the abaQulusi and others would find themselves transformed into labor tenants on the massive farms the Boers set up for themselves there.

Within the ranks of the uSuthu, supporters of the Zulu royal family, a decision had to be made. When Cetshwayo passed away, he left behind a pregnant wife. But not just any wife; she was his "great wife," whose child (if a boy) would have customarily been next in the line for the throne.<sup>387</sup> She did indeed give birth to a son, Manzolwandle.<sup>388</sup> However, Ndabuko and others stood to gain more if their nephew Dinuzulu became king. According to the official story repeated to British officials, Cetshwayo on his deathbed decreed that his son Dinuzulu should be king:

"There is my child: look after him for me. Bring him up well, for I have no other sons. Dinuzulu is my only son. There is your task."<sup>389</sup>

Whether or not Cetshwayo actually said this is unclear. More likely, Dinuzulu's uncles invented the dying wish in order to avoid any competition for the throne.<sup>390</sup> Regardless, their declaration essentially negated the purpose of a "great wife," arguably the most important role she could hold as the chosen heir bearer. In the taking of this from the *inkhosikazi*, the social currency of elite Zulu women was further devalued, regulated or in this case muted. The action was not intended as an attack on women as a category; but potentially, because of the chaos that the family was in, the expediency was deemed

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<sup>387</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 481. BPP, Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Zululand and Adjacent Territories, 1884, C.4037, at 41-42.

<sup>388</sup> Born in 1884, he would indeed later side with Zibhebhu against his brother Dinuzulu.

<sup>389</sup> JSA, 3:202.

<sup>390</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu* 86-9.

necessary and was an opportunity for these men to effectively marginalize Cetshwayo's great wife. All the same, that the women continued to act as caretakers of the royal children and to hold a great degree of control over their actual lives and everyday experiences is clear from the story of Dinuzulu's childhood, when Zibhebhu could humiliate him.

In an even greater marginalization of the Zulu elite as a whole, it was the Boers who would officially perform Dinuzulu's coronation ceremony and who would support him most effectively in reasserting rule over some of KwaZulu. On May 21, 1884, in a lampoon of British coronation, Boer "volunteers" (freebooters really) anointed the young prince with castor oil and proclaimed him King of the Zulu.<sup>391</sup> Far from a charitable crusade to reinstate Zulu monarchy, the coronation represented a confirmation of a deal between the desperate uSuthu and opportunistic Boer farmers, who agreed to lend their firepower to the enfeebled royalists in exchange for vast concessions of land.<sup>392</sup> Dinuzulu's campaigns into KwaZulu with his Boer supporters in 1884 resulted in success over his enemy Zibhebhu, but ultimately the land concessions that he made to gain the support of Louis Botha and other Boer mercenaries left him with disadvantageous territory and an impoverished remnant of a kingdom. The British government was loath to allow this new republic to gain more land. They also were concerned about the implications of the menacing specter of the Transvaal to the north and the attention of other European countries in the scramble for Africa. The uSuthu failed to obtain effective control over the area, and an increasingly concerned British

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<sup>391</sup> Laband, *Rise and Fall*, 371.

<sup>392</sup> For an example of individual women being simplified to "wives," see the case of Gence Fares Well. In the case, four of Dinuzulu's wives conspire to have the doctor killed for making Dinuzulu sick and for committing adultery. BPP, Further Correspondence Relating to Native Affairs in Natal, 1908, Cd.3888, at 16, 45-48.

government finally decided to lay claim to the remainder of the semi-independent KwaZulu. Still hoping to avoid full administrative and financial responsibility for KwaZulu, British officials again reinstated Zibhebhu in 1887. In 1888 the uSuthu resisted increasingly discriminatory tactics on the part of British officials, and in a final pacification the British took direct control in 1889.<sup>393</sup> They removed both Dinuzulu and two of his uncles tried them for high treason and exiled them to St. Helena that same year. Although 1887 would symbolize the official date of British annexation, in the lives of the *amakhosikazi*, the year when their *inkhosi enkulu* was exiled for treason along with his uncles and the last of the effectively ruling male household heads would have seemed a much more final alteration date and a final destruction of their family as it had been before.

Finally, ten years after invading and destroying the former kingdom's institutions, the British Empire took responsibility of what was left of Zulu territory in the Thukela River Valley. The Zulu royal family exercised extremely circumscribed and limited control after this point. The *amakhosikazi*, as a social position, became entirely subsumed to a superimposed political and social structure. The basis of tribute to chiefly families was changed to a regulated stipend for Dinuzulu, and all of the "government *amaduna*" would be forced to answer to their colonial superiors. In this new social order, royal women in the Zulu family, who were already in increasingly marginal roles, found themselves now part of a system that considered them legal minors.

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<sup>393</sup> Harry Escombe and Frank Campbell Dumat, *A Remonstrance on Behalf of the Zulu Chiefs, 1889* (Cape Town: City Printing Works, 1908).

## A New Queen

In the 1887 *Times of Natal* coverage of the July 5 annexation, the writer blandly notes this newest acquisition “failed to excite the slightest interest. No one went to the trouble of hoisting a flag, trying to raise a cheer, or even drinking to the prosperity of the latest addition to the British dominions.”<sup>394</sup> It would be an additional two years before Dinuzulu was exiled to St. Helena and the Zulu kingship officially trivialized, but this quote expresses the absence of fanfare in which Zulu ascendancy was vanquished. The British Empire was in the process of stretching its borders around the world. A contest between white nation-states to control other peoples was at its height, and increasing tensions between European countries would dominate the historical narrative in the next twenty years.

Though in due time KwaZulu would again erupt into conflict, the Zulu royal family had long been stripped of its ability to effectively raise opposition to an increasingly entrenched system of colonial extraction. Dinuzulu would not lead the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion, considered by some to be the dying breath of the old Zulu nation, though he would serve as a scapegoat for the British authorities involved. The Zulu royal family and the members of its *isigodhlo* had been dispersed, supervised, persecuted, and exiled since the early 1880s. Now under colonial control, *amakhosikazi* enjoyed not even the modest recognition that was offered to Dinuzulu by the British Government as an official (if impotent) representative of the Empire. While *amakhosikazi* may have been able to exert some limited influence in an informal sense

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<sup>394</sup> “The settlement, tasteful or distasteful, is a fait accompli.” *The Times of Natal*, 23 July, 1887.

over their male household members, they were doubly marginalized in a colonial system, which classified women as minors and were under the increasingly restrictive patriarchal rule of their Zulu brothers, husbands, and uncles. The systematic devaluing of Zulu hierarchies served to entrench inequalities between both genders and race in the new British colony.

In the James Stuart archive, *amakhosikazi* in Cetshwayo's house (Dinuzulu's mother and her contemporaries) are the last to be mentioned. Dinuzulu's wives and daughters appear only twice in list form, as part of Stuart's project to create a complete Zulu genealogy.<sup>395</sup> As such, the primary source for this study dries up. Historians also must contend with the fact that, after annexation, the Zulu royal family as a whole (men and women) saw their social significance uprooted and their authority replaced by British officials like James Stuart. Although KwaZulu had been annexed before and had been repartitioned at least three times, 1887 saw a final and more deliberate and effective appropriation of Zulu power. Before this final annexation, one might be able to imagine the possibility of a return by the Zulu royal house to hegemony. Perhaps the Zulu royal family could have carved out independent territory if Imperial Officials had been more sensitive to their cause. However, after Dinuzulu's first exile, the royals would never again rule independently. Although African peoples in the region later rallied around the royal family as a symbol of nationalist and African identity, the political reality was dead, and the significance of the position of *amakhosikazi* becomes increasingly difficult to argue.

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<sup>395</sup> JSA, 1:170; 355.



Ironically, 1887 also represents the first time since Mnkabayi acted as regent in 1816 that a woman would be the ultimate authority in kwaZulu. In the November 14 proclamation, it is a new woman who takes charge:

“The rule of the house of Chaka is a thing of the past. It is dead. It is like water spilt on the ground. The Queen rules now in Zululand and no one else. The Queen who conquered Cetshwayo has now taken the country into her own hands.”<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> BPP, Further correspondence Zululand and Adjacent territories, 1887, C.5331, at 64-65.

## Epilogue: 1889 and Onward

Of course, even after the Queen of England had been declared the ultimate authority of KwaZulu, the situation on the ground and the beliefs of the Zulu people did not immediately change. In fact, colonial writings after British annexation have a tendency to describe the Zulu people as unchanged and “backwards looking.”<sup>397</sup> This nostalgic propensity was patently false. Though the everyday lives of many African peoples may have maintained a certain endurance; years of wars, displacement, famine, and subsequent oppression had altered the integrity of the social system in kwaZulu—now the Natal Colony. The future would see dramatic shifts in the structure of Zulu society, driven by new economic organization, administration, and the resulting tensions of an industrializing, white-controlled South Africa. *Amakhosikazi* would not be immune to these massive shifts in political, economic, and social order, but there would be points of continuity in the lives of elite women despite this colossal change.

The colonial administration of Natal co-opted or deposed African rulers throughout the region. Those who stood against them were removed and replaced by other, more compliant Zulu *inkhosi* and sometimes commoners. The meaning of “elite” was thus diluted, and those who had been powerful under Zulu hegemony found themselves cast out. The restless Zulu youth began to challenge the authority of the patriarchal men, whom they felt were acting subordinate to the colonial forces.<sup>398</sup> They would have to contend with the increasingly intrusive, “Customary Law” system, which attempted to codify and thereafter dictate life for the amaZulu and other Africans, but through the lens of Westernized Christian morality. This separate code of law for native

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<sup>397</sup> Guy, *The View Across the River*, 440.

<sup>398</sup> Mahoney, *The Other Zulus*, 91-5.

peoples would become the basis of many of the apartheid laws later in the twentieth century. Originally intended to codify the essence of Zulu institutions, it clearly includes assumptions about Zulu society that did not mesh with reality and could therefore be harmful.<sup>399</sup> Relevantly, it might ignore or otherwise proscribe the roles of Zulu women, such that areas where they may previously held authority would be restricted. For example, the code assumed Zulu household heads had complete control over his wives' sexuality although that was not entirely true. As a result, an increased number of women were arrested for "crimes" of adultery after engaging in promiscuity that had been the norm before.<sup>400</sup> In this and other instances, women's power sources, which may have erred on the informal side and remained invisible in colonial pseudo-anthropological studies, became increasingly impotent in a legalized and segregated law system.

However, in the interstices of colonial rule, women also found opportunities to express authority and independence in their lives. They increasingly refused the husbands chosen for them by their fathers, opting instead for younger lovers or running away to mission stations.<sup>401</sup> As Benedict Carton has pointed out, and as we have seen in the example of Bathonyile, these women ironically turned to European patriarchs to assert themselves in opposition to their fathers.<sup>402</sup> In the process, they subjected

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<sup>399</sup> For example, *ilobola* became a fixed amount meaning that women were, in some ways, further commoditized, because they had a set price. The law-makers imagined *ilobola* to be a strict commercial exchange instead of a negotiated alliance between two families involving both exchange of commodities, and social bonds. See Thembisa Waetjen, "The 'Home' in Homeland: Gender, National Space, and Inkatha's Politics of Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 4 (1999): 51-68.

<sup>400</sup> Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 91.

<sup>401</sup> Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 92. See also Cherryl Walker, "Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labor System," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* ed. Cherryl Walker (London: David Phillip Publishers, 1990), 168-96.

<sup>402</sup> Benedict Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 87-111.

themselves to another patriarchal system, but were clearly able to negotiate in this system for their own gain.

Arguably, one of the most disruptive aspects of colonial rule was the imposition of tax systems on native peoples, involving census taking and democratization. Instituted to pay for the administration of KwaZulu, the “hut” tax was created in part to divert the flow of resources toward supporting the colonial enterprise, but additionally to encourage African peoples to participate as wage laborers.<sup>403</sup> A patriarchal head of a household was responsible for paying the hut taxes imposed on his *imizi* (homestead). The taxes were based on the number of huts, with an increase for the number of wives in a given *imizi*. These taxes were most often paid from wages of the young, unmarried men, but as this currency was not received under the supervision of the fathers, young men were able to negotiate exactly how they would support their father’s household, if at all. Subsequently, generational disputes and tensions began to ensue.<sup>404</sup> This was exacerbated by the rural-urban separation typical of migratory labor. Although the nature of age-divided *amabutho* set a precedent for generational conflict, the dynamics of industrialization presented a new challenge to the social order. Rural *imizi* became sites of familial conflicts between young, migratory Zulu men and their landed fathers. All together, these pressures composed “intolerable pressures which colonial society was exerting upon the peasant communities of Natal.”<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Sean Redding, “Governing the Zulu by Killing Them: Poll Tax and the Bambatha Rebellion in Natal and Zululand,” in Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation Power and Rebellion in South Africa 1880-1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 89-123.

<sup>404</sup> Benedict, *Blood from Your Children*, 60.

<sup>405</sup> Shula Marks, “Class, Ideology, and the Bambatha Rebellion,” in *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, ed. Donald Crummey (Portsmouth N.H.: Heinemann Education Books, 1986), 355.

*Dinuzulu and his mother Nomvimbi*

Dinuzulu would return to KwaZulu in 1897, but even then his authority—and thus we can presume the authority of the women of his household—was circumscribed. British colonial officials insisted that the return of the exiled prince would lead to a repeat of the 1888 rebellion. Thus they stipulated his reappearance with a throwing open of KwaZulu to white settlers. In December 1897, the Zululand Colony was officially annexed into Natal, allowing settlers from Natal Colony access to what was now Zululand Province. Starting in 1906, as a result of the subsequent Zululand Delimitation Commission of 1902-1904, forty percent of the best land in Zululand was set-aside for white settlers.<sup>406</sup> The people already living on those lands suddenly became rural labor tenants or had to seek work as migrant laborers to the towns and mines of an industrializing, white-ruled South Africa.

Dinuzulu himself had fathered two children by his “attendants” while he was in exile.<sup>407</sup> Binns writes, “During the eight years of Dinuzulu’s absence the duties of chieftainship had been carried out by his mother Oka Msweli [Nomvimbi], assisted by his Prime Minister Mankulumana; the latter had taken over much of the actual work of civil and minor criminal cases but Oka Msweli kept the power.”<sup>408</sup> This is an important aside. Nomvimbi, and perhaps other women in the Zulu royal family, may have continued to exercise ritual and socially significant influence, while the legal aspects of rule fell to male members of the household. It is possible that male individuals with the ability to access effective power through the colonial legal administration may have

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<sup>406</sup> Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars*, liv.

<sup>407</sup> Charles Binns reports that this information was “given to the author by chief Sangwene, Nongoma district.” Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 152. See fig. 4 for an image of Dinuzulu’s wives at St. Helena.

<sup>408</sup> Nomvimbi also went by Oka Msweli. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 164.

been able to assert themselves within a political and legal context more effectively than the women. To know for certain would require more extensive study into the twentieth century experience of Zulu royal women. We see in the case of Nomvimbi that Dinuzulu still listened to and stood by her decisions until she died on March 12, 1908.<sup>409</sup> While her influence is scarcely noted in our current histories about early twentieth-century Zulu society, Nomvimbi's presence seems to have been a constant in her son's life, and she clearly possessed the prestige to exercise power in certain circumstances in her son's stead.

In 1906, a new tax was levied in addition to the troublesome hut tax. A "poll" tax, or "head" tax, was to be charged on all men 18 years of age and older, in addition to the tax on *imizi*. The new tax was both a further obligation for the young migratory workers and a cause for additional grievances against the colonial government. Even so, it provided more leverage to the young men in generational disputes against their fathers. Tension rose, and in 1906 violence erupted, in what is now known as the Bambatha Rebellion.<sup>410</sup> Benedict Carton provides a lens through which to view the generational and gendered causes of this conflict, especially in relation to the poll tax and the opposition around land tenure/migrant labor.<sup>411</sup> Carton has argued convincingly that, instead of a proletarian uprising against British colonials and an attempt to rehabilitate Zulu authority, the uprising represented a generational dispute, with

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<sup>409</sup> All throughout his exile, Dinuzulu wrote to his mother at Ekubhazeni. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 151, 164; On Nomvimbi's death see BPP, Further Correspondence relating to Native Affairs in Natal, 1908, Cd.3998, at 110.

<sup>410</sup> For more detail on the Bambatha Rebellion, see Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising*; and most recently Jeff Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion*.

<sup>411</sup> Carton, *Blood of Our Children*, 88-94.

forward-looking rebels in some cases working to improve their own standing within the colonial state, even as they disparaged their complacent patriarchs.

The rebellion's significance has been the source of some contention between scholars. Early historians argued that it represented the dying breath of the Zulu kingdom and a last-ditch effort to return to pre-colonial ruling structures.<sup>412</sup> From more recent studies, it is clear that Dinuzulu was not a leader in the rebellion, but a colonial scapegoat.<sup>413</sup> The former interpretation hinges too heavily on the idea that the Zulu royal family was still a political reality, when in fact they had ceased to operate effectively long before then.<sup>414</sup> Shula Marks has suggested that the rebellion might be seen as the early rumblings of anti-apartheid movements, and Michael Mahoney posits that the rebellion was an example of a new Zulu nationalism and Neo-traditionalism that would serve to unify Natal Africans in opposition to the established regime.<sup>415</sup>

The role of women in this revolt, rebellion, or nationalist movement is a subject for further research. As with all conflict, women were certainly implicated, and in some cases supportive.<sup>416</sup> In a general sense, women under the colonial regime experienced increasingly restrictive legal measures and separation from an industrializing South Africa. Cherryl Walker has produced a convincing piece that discusses how women no longer signified the heart of agricultural production, as they had in the nineteenth

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<sup>412</sup> James Stuart in particular has held this view in his historical works, likely because in the aftermath Colonial administrators blamed the uprising on Dinuzulu.

<sup>413</sup> For a recent work that re-examines the uprising, see Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005).

<sup>414</sup> In another convincing piece, see Thembisa Waetjen, *Worker and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>415</sup> Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in 20th-century Natal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986; Sean Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation Power and Rebellion in South Africa 1880-1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

<sup>416</sup> See for example a Zulu *amakhosikazi* helping a young rebel escape British officers. Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 246.

century.<sup>417</sup> However, we do see them creating space for action through Christian groups, cultural musical practices, and the continuation of spiritual beliefs.<sup>418</sup> Mahoney also has made a case for the specific role of women in a national-political sense when it came to the concept of “homeland” in the early nineteenth century.<sup>419</sup>

### *On the Royal Family Then and Now*

The role of the Zulu royal family, however, can be more readily understood and does provide some insight into the ways that *amakhosikazi* as a group might be more rigorously examined in the future, despite the frustrating lack of information from the James Stuart Archive. Dinuzulu himself did not lead the rebellion, but he has been implicated in it and was certainly invoked as a unifying factor by the rebels. He played a very small role, at one point potentially harboring fugitive rebels, but he likely was largely uninvolved. Dinuzulu himself was extremely legally vulnerable, having been stripped of his position as king of all amaZulu and treated instead as any other British *inkhosi*. He was implicated in what was called a “political persecution” by one of the British officials and was exiled once more to St. Helena.<sup>420</sup> Dinuzulu’s prosecution was part of a larger political project attempting to demoralize the rebels and provide an example to other would-be insurgents.

The colonial efforts to curb rising nationalist sentiment in KwaZulu would be ineffective. After Dinuzulu’s death on October 18, 1913, the Zulu royal family did not hold ultimate authority, but descendants of the royal Zulu household continued to hold

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<sup>417</sup> Walker, “Gender and Development,” 196.

<sup>418</sup> Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty*, 96-107.

<sup>419</sup> See Shireen Hassim, “Family Motherhood and Zulu Nationalism: the Politics of the Inkatha Women’s Brigade,” *Feminist Review* 43(1993): 1-24.

<sup>420</sup> Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 245.



prominent positions in Zulu society and played active roles in shaping its future. One of Dinuzulu's sons, for example, started the Inkatha Freedom Party, which advocated for sovereignty of the Zulu family within kwaZulu and played a huge role in the political struggle for greater equality in KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>421</sup> Further descendants, including the current Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini, play significant roles in the politics of the region even today. The Zulu royal family served as a focal point, though not the inventors of, the concept of "Zulu" as a self-identified ethnicity that could serve political and social needs in addition to cultural ones.<sup>422</sup>

Particular women in the royal Zulu family could be further studied in order to understand how the royal Zulu women remained involved in the social, political, and cultural context of kwaZulu. Princess Constance Magogo, for example, was regarded as preeminent in Zulu traditional music.<sup>423</sup> A recording of her by Hugh Tracey popularized her skill for a global audience.<sup>424</sup> As a skilled *imbongo*, her *izibongo* and *izangelo* (nursery tales) could in some circumstances serve as a form of coded expression within a larger cultural context, where "women's personal, private selves

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<sup>421</sup> For more on the Inkatha Freedom Party, see Nathaniel Cope, *To Bind a Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism: 1913–1933*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993).

<sup>422</sup> Michael Mahoney argues that the idea of "Zulu" as an ethnicity did not exist before the late 1800s. Although colonial officials, British settlers and Boer farmers each referred to the African people who they met by particular names, those people may have identified themselves more readily with their local clan groups than the elite ruling family. Mahoney, *The Other Zulu*, 1-15.

<sup>423</sup> Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2000), 187-88; for the actual recorded works of Magogo, see Hugh Tracey, *The Zulu Songs of Princess Constance Magogo kaDinuzulu* (Music of Africa Series no. 37 1974). See fig. 5, Hugh Tracey recording Zulu bowstring music (possibly Princess Magogo herself).

<sup>424</sup> See fig. 3, 4, and 5 for possible images of Princess Magogo playing music and posing for Hugo Tracey's research. Hugo Tracey was an ethnomusicologist who recorded and archived traditional instruments. For a full biography, see Diane Thram, *For Future Generations: Hugh Tracey and the International Library of African Music* (Grahamstown, South Africa: International Library of African Music, 2010).

were largely silenced.”<sup>425</sup> Through music as expression, “women whether royal or not had access to a coded art form that allowed them some means of self-affirmation and self-remembrance.”<sup>426</sup> In addition to being able to express some concerns unique to her position as a woman, Princess Magogo enjoyed a considerable amount of respect within her own community.<sup>427</sup> Her stories, rich with insights that do not grace the pages of official colonial documentation, were the foundation of Charles Binns’s insightful book about her father’s life.

Recently, the move to honor women’s stories has gained traction in South Africa. More studies and books have been published that aim to reclaim some of the lost history of Zulu women.<sup>428</sup> Princess Magogo, for example, was the subject of an opera in South Africa that attempted to recast her life as part of a nationalist narrative in which women might play a role.<sup>429</sup> Some critics have argued that the opera “was still trapped in the older paradigm of nationalism” and simplified Magogo’s character into either a monument of womanhood, or a sacrifice for a national good.<sup>430</sup> Nonetheless, it still stands as an example of attempts to include more of the royal women in the historical understanding. Scholars have also begun to look more closely into the lives of powerful women such as Nandi and Mnkabayi, whose praises were sung among those of kings. This promising move provides hope for continued efforts to discuss and explore the

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<sup>425</sup> Hourwich Reyher et. Al., *Zulu Woman*, 203.

<sup>426</sup> Liz Gunner, “Afterword,” in Rebecca Hourwich Reyher et al., *Zulu Woman: The Life Story of Christina Sibiya* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1999), 203.

<sup>427</sup> Charles Binns also indicates that she still held a lot of respect: “The author had a striking manifestation of this veneration on a recent visit to the Princess Magogo, a daughter of Dinuzulu... As the princess appeared, instantly every man jumped to his feet, raised his hand and gave the royal salute ‘Bayete’: it was spontaneous and enthusiastic.” Binns, *Dinuzulu*, 167.

<sup>428</sup> See Historiography section.

<sup>429</sup> Mzilikazi Khumalo, *Princess Magogo KaDinuzulu* (Durban: Opera Africa, 2002).

<sup>430</sup> Innocentia J. Mhlambi, “The Question of Nationalism in Mzilikazi Khumalo’s Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu (2002),” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27, no. 3 (2015): 294-310.

lives of other important women who this paper briefly touches on, starting perhaps with Langazana, Mawa, Nomantshali, or Monase. Unfortunately, many accounts of the elite women, who also held the social position and title of *amakhosikazi*, may not have been recorded in James Stuart's interviews. Perhaps African knowledge sources could provide further insight into the lives of the *amakhosikazi*. *Izibongo*, which have existed as repositories of history and knowledge since before Shaka's time, may serve as a source of more and better information for those who would continue the hunt for these fugitive stories.

## Conclusion

Both historical and feminist scholars have begun to question received wisdom regarding the nature of pre-colonial Zulu society. Post-structuralism and efforts to decolonize history both challenge the fundamental assumptions built into a historical structure based on pseudo-anthropological categorization and classification of African peoples.<sup>431</sup> Women have been identified as key to the political institutions, social organization, and economic viability of pre-colonial African societies, even in patriarchal paradigms.<sup>432</sup> Men and women lived and operated along different social rubrics wherein gender was a system of organization, but it is clear that both categories were capable of accessing spaces of agency within Zulu society. However, the archival evidence privileges male perspectives due to both colonial authorship and access points to African society. As a result, glimpses into the *isigodhlo* and into the lives of the women who lived there are rare. Even so, when they do appear in historical evidence,

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<sup>431</sup> Mary Ebum Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1997), page?; Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, 20-28.

<sup>432</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*, 126-40.

we can see examples of ways that these women may have operated in the world. This thesis was written in the pursuit of women's narratives, which have become fugitive within the accepted historical record. The study has been largely undertaken by identifying the places where women become visible in archival evidence, and using these stories to develop discussion about women's power. In addition to tracking the changes of the social position of *amakhosikazi* in the royal Zulu lineage, this paper seeks to propose reasons, both internal and external, for those changes in power.

The *amakhosikazi* held positions with access to a patterned type of agency. They can be identified as agents of rumor and secrecy within the elite circles of Zulu society. In a related way, *amakhosikazi* had access to supernatural elements, which allowed them to inject themselves into circumstances that were normally unavailable to them, yet rendered them vulnerable. As both economical and biological reproducers, the royal women could influence subsequent generations and also were responsible for the daily functioning of Zulu life. In a sexual sense, women were perceived as particular access points to powerful men in Zulu society, which could either privilege them, as with Cetshwayo's favoritism to certain *umndlunkulu*, or/and expose them to violence, as with Shaka. All throughout, some women were capable with varying success to cater to a patriarchal and clannish society in the interest of furthering their own needs. Later on, women were able to negotiate with external forces in order to achieve freedoms that may not have been otherwise accessible.

Women of the *isigodhlo* held highly prestigious roles, particularly around the beginning of the 19th century, in what was not a strictly or simply authoritarian patriarchal society, but a complex interweaving of insular families in which there was

fluidity between spaces of gendered agency. Mnkabayi, Nandi, and a few other *amakhosikazi* bargained to position themselves in influential spaces within as the kingdom expanded, remaining both vulnerable to outright violence and capable of subtle manipulation of male family members. In the subsequent shift of power, some of these women situated themselves as regional power brokers over *amakhanda* under the rule of Dingane. In the following years British Settlers and Boer Trekkers weakened the Zulu house, and provided access to new sources of political and economic power that disproportionately favored Zulu males. After Dingane's fall from power, Mpande was unable to consolidate Zulu hegemony as effective, and *amakhosikazi* were unable to access the same power that Mnkabayi and her generation had enjoyed. In addition, external forces had burgeoning influence over the royal family's affairs, and women's actions to assert independence were increasingly circumscribed. Although women remained present in the de facto life, their access to meaningful power was restricted so that by the time of the Anglo-Zulu War, the position of the *amakhosikazi* was considerably more subjugated than it had been at the start of the century. In the following decades, *amakhosikazi* experienced repeated diasporas before being subsumed into the British legal system. Under the new system of law, they were doubly marginalized, both as women and as black Africans.

This piece merely begins to question the nature of *amakhosikazi* experiences and to shed light on the half of Zulu society that is mostly fugitive from academic understanding. It has also shown that ample material exists to be evaluated, despite a limited number of sources. Continued research could contribute to a growing body of work that celebrates women in an African context and recognizes the broad historical

value of exploring the experiences of women as active participants in their own lives and within their societies generally. The story is far from finished.

### *Afterword*

Through the study of primary evidence on Zulu pre-colonial times, I have come to recognize the harmful nature of histories that are presumptuous and self-serving. The only solution seems to be an attempt to complicate the narrative, in order to approach it from a holistic perspective. I don't believe this is a simple act of charity. It is necessary if we are to understand history as an exercise in understanding ourselves. The colonial practice of classifying, and thereby caricaturing, other people's histories obscures the actual, complex experience of marginalized groups living within that society and serves to mask injustices that might exist within a culture's own view. Though located in a different field of study, Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns' work on received wisdom about the African landscape provides a parallel example of the ways in which received "theoretical straitjackets," originating in colonial understandings of African history, are perpetuated.<sup>433</sup> They recognize that, more than simple ignorance, these oversights rest on the application of certain methods/theories and serve the interest of particular political/economic groups or particular institutions, but appear logical based on the cultural background of its proponents. This is evident in the James Stuart Archive, in which a socio-anthropological method is used by an agent of the colonial administration to assert the logic of Victorian England on the Zulu landscape. What would be preferable is a contextualized description that brings both dignity and clarity to the ambiguous but actual experience of human beings.

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<sup>433</sup>Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns, introduction to *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 5.

In avoiding a caricature of the past, we may be better suited to approach and understand dynamics within our current time. In the media, Africa is too frequently simplified, describing despotic dictators operating in chaotic, incomprehensible, and perpetual conflict. This story includes characteristics of approaches to knowledge of, around, and about Africa that are evident in the flawed colonial writings on which conventional wisdom about Zulu history is based. In these limited understandings, complex cultural and social logic systems, whether formal or informal, are discounted as illogical. Stereotypes are superimposed over complex situations, thereby limiting responses and blunting actual comprehension. One can imagine a current news channel describing chaos in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the same way that settlers spoke about the supposed “*mfecane*.”<sup>434</sup> It is easy to explain away the complex situations, but the practice of simplification has the potential of obscuring the same kinds of knowledge and experience of marginalized people today that this discussion hopes to recover. It is simply not enough to blame lack of thorough analysis on the inferiority of other people, or to simplify and thereby limit human experience. In the pursuit of this through historical analysis, it may do to quote Norman Etherington:

“The pages cannot be left blank without doing a profound injustice to the common people who lived through them, and some of their extraordinary leaders whose names deserve to be remembered.”<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> *Mfecane* involved the idea that Shaka depopulated the Thukela River Basin and more in his ruthless expansion. This concept served to justify settlers streaming into occupied lands as “empty.” See Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 329-46.

<sup>435</sup> Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks*, 75.

## Figures

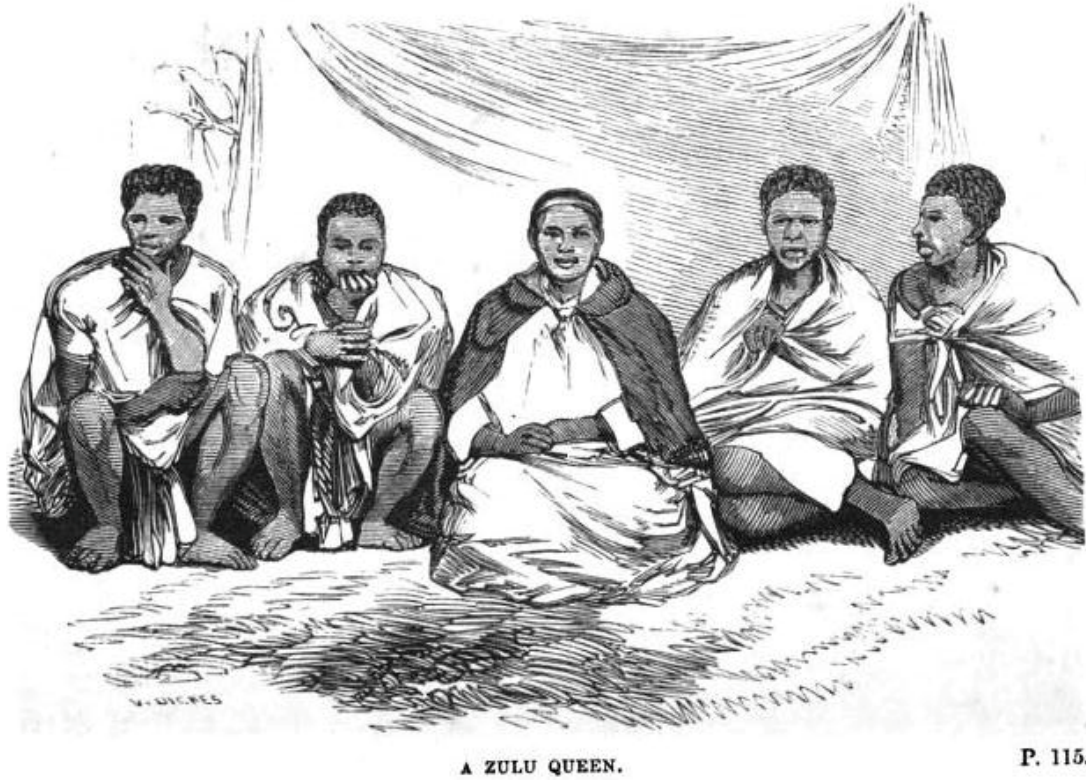


Figure 1: Image of Nomantshali as drawn by Bishop Colenso<sup>436</sup>

Bishop Colenso visited Nomantshali in 1858 at Mpande's request because the Queen was feeling ill.

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<sup>436</sup> Colenso, *First Steps of the Zulu Mission*, 115.





Fig. 2 Cetshwayo was accompanied by these four women on his exile from kwaZulu in 1879.<sup>437</sup>

According to the caption by John Laband, in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom*, Cetshwayo told the women in this picture to compose themselves seriously for the camera. Their identities are not recorded in the historical literature.

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<sup>437</sup>Originally "Courtesy of Ian Knight," Laband, *Rise and Fall*, image 47.



Fig. 3 Cetshwayo in London August 1882<sup>438</sup>



Fig. 4 Dinuzulu's wives in Western dress at St. Helena in the early twentieth century.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Collection: Album D06/001-160.

<sup>439</sup> Killie Campbell Africana Collection: Album A50/001-054.



Fig. 5 Hugh Tracey recording Zulu women playing the umakhweyana bowstring instrument.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Rhodes University: International Library of African Music, Hugh Tracey Archive.

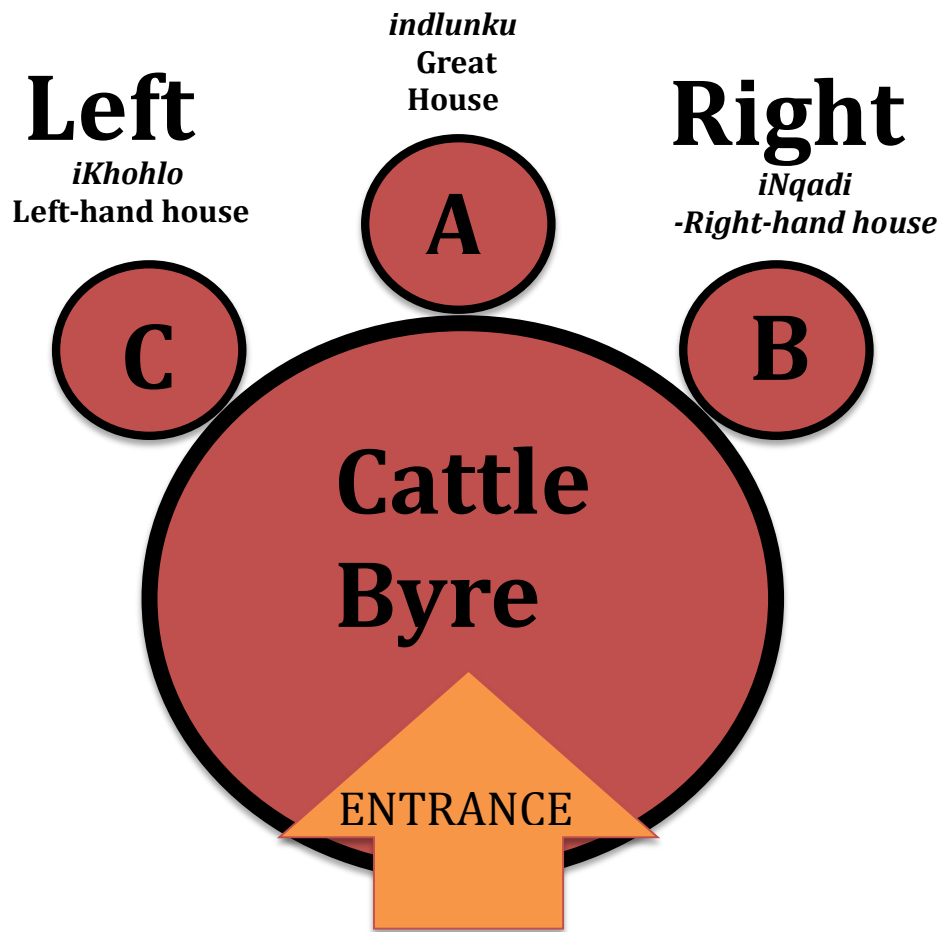


Fig. 6 *Umuzi* Generalized structure<sup>441</sup>

As Kuper has shown there are different general arrangements of the houses in Bantu homesteads. The order of wives, entrances to the cattle byre and Left, right for houses vary amongst groups. The situation shown above indicates general Zulu arrangement. The wives are ordered by seniority A, B, then C. The Great wife in the *indlunku* and the second in the higher status *iNqadi* to the right and finally the *iKhohlo*. The great hut is under the charge of the “most important woman in the house” the mother of the headman or the *amakhosikazi* or a substitute wife if she has passed on.

<sup>441</sup> Kuper, “Southern Bantu Homestead,” 11.

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